“All Our Work is Political”: Men’s Experience in Pro-Feminist Organizing

by

Kate C. Bojin

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

© Copyright by Kate C. Bojin 2012
“All Our Work is Political”: Men’s Experience in Pro-Feminist Organizing

Kate C. Bojin

Master of Arts

Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

2012

Abstract

This research project examines the personal and political experiences of five men engaged in pro-feminist organizing. Their experiences are explored in the context of the emergence of anti-feminist groups, and an increasingly volatile funding environment whereby women’s rights organizations are seeing their financial resources threatened. Using a critical and sociological approach to masculinities, significant challenges at the personal level for these pro-feminist men are examined and are shown to compound engagement with women feminists, and the potential of cross gender partnerships. A people-oriented qualitative approach is employed to capture men’s personal journeys and how they self-identify with the feminist movement. This research adds to the prevalent “Man Question”, contesting men’s engagement in the feminist movement. Ultimately, however, the thesis concludes that men’s engagement in the feminist movement needs to be clearly positioned as a political project with an explicit commitment to building alliances with women’s rights networks.
Acknowledgements

A part of me thinks I should have written the Acknowledgment section upon completing my thesis. However, I feel confident that those that started with me along this journey will be there until the end. First and foremost my thesis supervisor, Angela Miles. Over baguettes and cheese, I was able to gain clarity on the why’s, what’s and how’s of my research, whilst being reminded of the value of a curious mind and being bold. While I know more revisions are likely necessary for this thesis, I thank her for allowing me to be bold and submit. To my second reader, Dr. Wayne Martino for your incredibly helpful suggestions, motivation and positivity. Thank you.

To my colleague and mentor, Sarah Hendriks for supportively pushing and shoving me along (“just keep going”) - always looking out for great literature to pass on, for fostering a sense of purpose, and sharing a good (great) laugh. To my family- for encouraging me to pursue my passions, tolerating too much jargon during Sunday dinners and keeping me in check by asking me for “thesis updates”. Inspiring my passion for women’s rights, and introducing me to feminism, I thank Dr. Helen Ramirez.

To my friends, encouraging and inspiring me to carry on and being a very needed distraction. Specifically Jennifer Hann, who encouraged me to tame my obsession with using puns and excessively changing my thesis title, for asking hard questions, keeping me abreast of deadlines while overseas, and being a friend. Thank you.

To my research participants whom lie at the core of this research. Thank you for your openness, humour, clarity, and insight continue to inspire me. Thank you.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. p. 1-20
Acknowledgements ..............................................................................................................
Table of Contents ..............................................................................................................

Chapter 1- Introduction to the Topic ..............................................................p. 1-20
  1.1- Background: The Rise of Pro-Feminism ................................................................. p. 1
  1.2- Analytical Framework ............................................................................................... p. 4
  1.3- Literature Review: Perspectives on Men in the Feminist Movement ......p. 13
       1.3.1- The (Depoliticized) Men’s Movement: On the Margins of Feminism ...................................................................................... p. 13
       1.3.2 - The Pro-Feminist Male: A Paradoxical Identity ......................... p. 17

Chapter 2- Qualitative Inquiry: Feminist Research on Men’s Pro-Feminist
   Activism .................................................................................................................. p. 21-30
  2.1- Methodology .......................................................................................................... p. 21
       2.1.2- Research Focus ............................................................................................ p. 21
       2.1.3- Utilizing a Self-Reflective and Feminist Approach ......................... p. 23
       2.1.4- Participant Recruitment ............................................................................ p. 26
  2.2- About the Male Participants .................................................................................. p. 27
  2.3- Reflections on the Interview Process ................................................................... p. 29

Chapter 3- A Few Good Men: Diverse Paths, United in Purpose .............p. 31-40
  3.1- Introduction .......................................................................................................... p. 31
  3.2- The Power of Experience: Men’s Reflections ...................................................... p. 31
  3.3- Fostering Personal Transformation: A Belief and Excitement in the
       Possibility of Change ............................................................................................... p. 33
  3.4- Men on Guard: Overcoming Guilt and Defensiveness ...................................... p. 34
  3.5- The Self-Reflective Pro-Feminist Male ................................................................. p. 36

Chapter 4- Towards a “Gender Equality Agenda” ........................................p. 41-66
  4.1- Introduction .......................................................................................................... p. 41
  4.2- Alliance-building with Women’s Rights Networks: “The Foundation”
       of Men’s Pro-Feminist Organizing ....................................................................... p. 41
  4.3- Alliance-Building in Practice and Strategies for Collaboration ................. p. 45
  4.4- The Politics of Space: Alliance-Building Across Gender Lines .................. p. 48
       4.4.1- Space to Learn and (Unlearn) for Pro-feminist Men ..................... p. 50
  4.5- Working Across Silos and Towards Social Justice: The Potential of Men’s
       Pro-Feminist Organizing ...................................................................................... p. 52
4.6- Beyond the Donor Agenda: Addressing “The Resource Question”…..p. 55
   - 4.6.1: You Can’t Manage what you Don't Measure………………p. 55
   - 4.6. 2: “Creating a Bigger Pie”: Increasing Funding for Gender
     Equality Work.................................................................p. 58
4.7- Will The Real Pro-Feminist Man Please Stand Up? Confronting the
Backlash.................................................................p. 63

Chapter 5- Conclusion.................................................................p.66-69

5.1 - Concluding Thoughts: “Moving Forward Together”......................p. 66
5.2- Research Implications........................................................p. 67
5.3- Limitations of Study............................................................p. 68

References.................................................................p. 70-80

Appendix A- Research Synopsis for Participants................................p. 81
Appendix B- Email Text to Research Participants................................p. 82
Appendix C- Participant Consent Form........................................p. 83
Chapter 1
Introduction to the Topic

1.1 Background: The Rise of Pro-Feminism

On a global scale, increasing numbers of men across diverse backgrounds, class, sexuality, ability and age are showing their support for women’s human rights and gender equality. This research project seeks to contribute significantly to our limited knowledge of men active in the feminist movement and their perspectives on the value of and challenges in building alliances with women’s rights networks. The challenges facing pro-feminist men are numerous. Anti-feminist men’s groups are claiming to belong to a growing men’s movement and women’s rights organizations fear and object to any of their limited funding being diverted to support pro-feminist men’s groups. As the term suggests, men’s pro-feminist organizing can be understood as operating under the feminist umbrella. This growing field encapsulates wide-ranging yet interconnected issues, including the promotion of: LGBTQ rights, sexual/reproductive health, economic justice, anti-violence, and others. Organizations consisting mainly of men (as stand-alone or separate entities) may potentially create a problematic ideological distance from the priorities and agendas of women’s rights organizations. While the necessity of this collaboration is widely recognized, little work has been done on the inherent tensions, and challenges pro-feminist men face in building meaningful alliances with women’s rights networks.

Work with boys and men for gender equality is an increasingly trendy and ‘hot’ topic in development. This has created an environment in which women’s organizations have to answer to donor’s queries of ‘where are the men?’ (Meer, n.d, p. 15). Identifying positive roles and strategies in which men and boys can contribute to gender equality is relatively recent (Connell,
2000). Programming and advocacy focused on engaging men and boys for gender equality now span the globe. Some of the more well-funded and recognized organizations include: White Ribbon Campaign (Toronto), MenEngage (Global Online Network), Sonke Gender Justice (South Africa), Instituto Promundo (Brazil), and MASVAW (Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women, India). Tracing the male engagement for gender equality in the field of international development, Cornwall et al. (2011) explore its roots in the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. This was the first forum where the “international community challenged men to play substantive and meaningful roles in promoting gender equality” (p. 4). Shortly after, the Beijing Platform for Action restated the principle of shared responsibility to include partnerships with men for gender equality. It stressed men’s roles to support women by sharing childcare and household work equality, and men’s responsibility in the prevention of HIV and STIs” (p. 4). In a recent global symposium hosted by MenEngage “both men and women reiterated that it is of the utmost importance that individuals and organizations working with men and boys engage in dialogue and collaborate even more with women’s rights groups, and ensure that their work furthers women’s empowerment and gender equity in the most effective ways possible” (Atkin, Barker, Ricardo, Nascimento & Azvedo du Auglar, 2009, p. 5).

Despite the growing pains of men’s pro-feminist organizing there is widespread recognition that, without male involvement, gender interventions will be limited in their ability to transform unequal power relations (Cornwall & White, 2011). Stepping Stones, one particularly promising gender interventionist program, “aims to promote sexual health through building stronger and more equitable relationships between sexual partners, using participatory learning approaches. The program has been shown to be effective in changing young men’s
sexual practices and reducing levels of violence” (Jewkes, Nduna, Levin, Jama, Dunkle, Puren & Duvvury 2008, p. 391). A study conducted by MASVAW (Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women) featured 27 open ended interviews with male participants on the personal changes they have experienced from participating in MASVAW’S anti-violence programming. The results showed that coercive sex was reduced, there was an increase in more gender equitable attitudes amongst men and increased practices of non-violent conflict management (MASVAW, Save the Children Sweden, 2008, p. 32).

It becomes clear that working with men to promote women’s human rights has great benefits for women, however critical questions on the scope, authenticity and intentions of pro-feminist men’s engagement remain. Nevertheless, despite these critical questions, acceptance of men’s role and capacity to support the feminist movement seem to be increasing. Chant and Gutmann (2000) carried out research with 41 gender and development practioners to assess their attitudes on masculinities and development. All but a handful of participants expressed a “strong desire to include men in GAD work.” One quote from an interviewee:

I think it’s really positive that there is a strong push now to looking at men. For political reasons it’s vital, and for practical reasons as well. Because we all know stories about how projects have been undermined because men were excluded from them.

(Interview with Helen O’Connell, Education and Policy Coordinator, Oneworld Action, London, 8 July 1999, p. 279)

While there is increasing support for men to support gender equality tensions and contradictions remain for men in terms of negotiating their involvement in the feminist movement.
1.2 Analytical Framework

*Men as Gendered Beings: A Critical Look at Men and Masculinities Research*

Research on men is not a new concept. However, a focus on masculinity, or men as gendered beings, is relatively recent (Morgan, 1981). Seeing men as gendered beings is, for Connell (1997), critical to shift from conceptualizing men as the “problem” to seeing them as the “solution” to gender equality. Gardiner (2002) stresses a sense of urgency for women feminists to engage with masculinity studies and interrogate men as gendered beings, as only “partial explanations of society can be produced if it does not understand how men are shaped by masculinity” (p. 9). Few (female) feminist scholars have undertaken research on “rethinking men’s relation to feminist thought and action” (Gardiner, 2001; Riley, 1988; Segal, 1990). This research project will add to this elaboration of men’s relationship to the feminist movement and position masculinity as “a contested field of power moves and resistances, rather than being constructed as a fixed set of power relations” (Hebert, 2007, p. 37). Recently there have been attempts to conceptualize a “feminist-inflected masculinity studies” (Gardiner, 2002) which is useful in grounding my research, specifically:

- Masculinity is a gender, and therefore men as well as women have undergone historical and cultural processes of gender formation that distribute power and privilege unevenly.
- Masculinity is not monolithic
- Both genders can and should cooperate intellectually and politically

I firmly ground my research in critical and sociological masculinities theory, which allows for an interrogation of the political implications of masculinities work (Cornwall, White, Connell, Kimmel, Pease, Messner, Flood). Similar to the very social constructions which define it, the field of men and masculinities is in flux. While these social constructs may be evolving, men
continue to benefit from the “patriarchal dividend” which Connell (1997) explores as resulting in “higher honour, prestige and right to command.” He goes on that men also benefit from a “material dividend”, specifically in “rich capitalist countries, men’s average incomes are approximately double than women’s… in terms of state power, men are 10 times more likely than women to hold office” (p. 82). These dividends are inherent in the impacts and process of hegemony as Connell notes “the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend” (p. 79). Furthermore, Connell notes the patriarchal dividend fuels resistance from men to challenge social constructions of masculinity and is a key challenge in male engagement for gender equality. While Welsh (2010) does not refer to the patriarchal dividend specifically he infers it stating “there is growing evidence that individual men benefit in a real way, instigating changes particularly within their immediate families, there are concerns, especially among feminists, with regard to their ability to transcend the personal dimension and to challenge and change the structural aspects of institutionalized patriarchy” (p. 305).

Institutionalized patriarchy sustains the workings of hegemonic masculinity and can be referred to as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p.77). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note “the practices that construct hegemonic masculinity should be understood as complex, dynamic, and potentially contradictory” (p. 852). Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is not unitary or static but instead varies significantly across time and space (Morrell, 2001) and at local, regional, and global levels” (Connell et al., 2005). While perhaps not static, hegemonic masculinity represents a system of oppression
characterized by social, economic and political control over women. This control operates through white male privilege, and delegitimizes women’s needs, concerns and priorities. Hegemonic masculinity is particularly salient for my research as pro-feminist men are inherently challenging the oppressive structure of hegemony in both their personal lives and professional work.

Male engagement in feminism is inherently complex, but necessary as “gender roles, relations and identities have also been undergoing considerable upheaval in recent years” (Chant & Gutmann, 2000; 2002). As men are entering the sphere of changing gender roles, space is needed to both clarify and contest this engagement, without trivializing or dominating women’s spaces on which the feminist movement is founded. Cornwall and White (2000) explore the contentious issue of integrating work to change men and masculinities into programs for gender justice and development. They stress that indeed men are already involved, and that “completely excluding men is not in fact an option and what’s critical is finding the most progressive ways to channel this involvement” (p. 3). The authors go on to state that “masculinity is a constantly evolving social construct, and must be reconstructed in non-oppressive ways” (p. 5).

Heath (1987) cautions that while social constructions of masculinity are changing, men are not necessarily changing in the ways feminists would like. If men’s pro-feminist organizing is to contribute to transformative change it must focus on structural change, and not solely at men’s individual level of change. A compelling “feminist rationale” for welcoming men’s involvement in the attainment of gender equality has been established (Flood, 2011, p. 359). The more critical question is not why engage men- but how. Literature addressing the “Man Question” (Holmgren & Heath, 2009) has centered mainly on men’s personal identification to
feminism (*to be or not to be* a feminist). While these important personal issues are considered here, this broader exploration also includes attention to neglected political issues of men’s pro-feminist organizing.

*Men and Masculinities as a Political Project*

It has been argued that any deconstruction of men and masculinities requires a feminist (political) analysis for men to contribute effectively to the feminist struggle. Cornwall, Edstrom and Greig (2011) pose a significant query “what would it take to politicize the men and masculinities field?” (p. 6). Welsh (2010) explores the criticisms of the ‘masculinities question’ in the Nicaraguan context stating masculinities work has been “expensive, time-consuming and lack[ing] a clear strategic, political vision” (p. 304). Cornwall et al. (2011) stress the need to include a “men and masculinities perspective” to better capture how men and boys can support women’s empowerment. Applying a feminist analysis, Cornwall et al. stress the importance of politicizing men and masculinities, stating “a concern with men and masculinities has been taken up selectively by development agencies to pursue a very partial gender agenda… with a selective emphasis on certain issues and areas at the cost of addressing structural inequities at the root of gender inequality” (p.6). Politicizing masculinity requires that the negative effects of the social constructions of masculinity do not exclusively focus on men’s lives, but also on women’s lived realities and how these constructions shape structural inequality. Flood (2007) importantly acknowledges these social constructs as having negative implications on women and also having an effect on men’s relationships with themselves, families, communities and broader society. These dual implications of masculinity demonstrate the relational nature of the social constructions of gender. Gatens (1996) elaborates on the implications of masculinity and femininity, stating “what is inherently problematic is not the difference between masculinity
and femininity per se, but how these social constructions create behaviours and identities that perpetuate male dominance/superiority and female subordination/inferiority” (found in Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p. 22). Masculinity and femininity according to Gatens are problematic due to their influence in creating unequal power relations between men and women.

Dolan (2002) has a more radical approach to masculinity, considering not only the social constructions of masculinity, but also its use as a “political weapon.” Dolan elaborates on the role of institutions, such as the state and churches as utilizing this political weapon. Implicating the Catholic Church in the Nicaraguan context, Kampwirth (2006) blasts the Church for its support of the anti-feminist movement and use of masculinity as a political weapon against women’s rights organizations. Deconstructing hegemonic masculinity needs to inform men’s engagement in the feminist movement. In a study by Wetherell and Griffin (1991), Michael Kimmel an influential masculinities academic was interviewed stating “efforts to understand masculinities are by definition political; they identify the dynamics that constitute the reproduction of other forms of power relations” (p. 382). It is also deeply personal as pro-feminist men navigate the paradoxical challenge of being inherently part of the “problem” as men, while attempting to also be part of the “solution” to inequality. While masculinity is currently utilized as a larger system of political control over women, it can also be reconstructed to embrace values based on equality, respect and commitment to gender justice, the basis of being pro-feminist.

Men have historically been problematized as the “objects” within the feminist movement, and as barriers to achieving gender equality. Paradoxically, Heath (1987) tackles both the “impossibility” of men being feminists, and the necessity of men joining the struggle for gender equality and women’s human rights. He explores men as “objects” of feminism, to be
transformed, while women are the ‘subjects’ of feminism, the initiators, change makers, and the driving force” (p. 2). Similarly, Avila associates women as subjects of feminism stating that “the feminist as ‘subject’ raises her voice to denounce oppression but she also raises her voice to make proposals for change” (p. 117). The binary of men as “objects” and women as “subjects” is simplistic and problematic if men are to play authentic and transformative roles in the feminist movement, they must be both the “objects” and “subjects” of feminism. It is essential however women retain their status as the movers and shakers (subjects) of feminism, while allowing space for pro-feminist men to contribute meaningfully.

Can men “do” feminism? Hebert (2007) revives the “Man Question” across feminisms stating “if the project of feminism is indeed to eliminate the subordination of women and all its manifestations, it is time now to move forward, toward an acknowledgment that socio-political change requires the participation of women and men – with all of their differences” (p. 43). Working across difference along gender lines remains a central challenge for men’s pro-feminist organizing, particularly in an increasingly diverse and fragmented feminist movement (Lingard & Douglas, 1999). Nelson (2000) takes a deeper look into the functioning of pro-feminism stating it perpetuates hegemonic notions of masculinity, operating very much like the early stages of feminism, neglecting issues of race, class, and sexuality. She would argue pro-feminism has been a “white man’s project, and black men, gay men are homogenized and broadly conceived as Others, not wanted within this movement for liberation” (p. 126). Alternately Lingard and Douglas (1999) define pro-feminism as “recognizing differences among men and masculinities, while also acknowledging the ways in which social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality intersect with masculinity” (p.160).
Men’s experience in pro-feminist organizing lies at the core of this research project. While there are varied definitions, a political commitment to feminist principles seems to lie at the core. Kimmel (1998) advances the notion of a “gentleman’s auxiliary of feminism”, “as it acknowledges that this [feminism] is a revolution of which men are a part, but not a central part, not its most significant part” (p. 67). He goes on to state that pro-feminist men can be feminism’s “cheerleaders, its allies, its foot soldiers” (p. 68). To be a pro-feminist man requires a contradictory acknowledgment of one’s inherent role perpetuating inequality with a political commitment to opposing inequality. Men’s pro-feminist organizing is still finding its feet and hasn’t gone without critique as having “almost no life outside the university” (Gardiner, p. 4), and privileging the voices and contributions of white, advantaged, heterosexual men (Nelson, 2012). Men’s pro-feminist organizing as a “white man’s project” (Nelson, 2012) unjustly advances the core identities of hegemonic masculinity (white, heterosexual, able-bodied, wealthy), the very construct pro-feminist men seek to dismantle.

**Pro-Feminist Organizing and Alliance-Building: Contesting Definitions**

Men’s pro-feminist organizing will be explored as a political project, requiring collaboration from both men and women, however there are varying perspectives on whether alliance-building is even possible. Connell (2003) states there is “widespread disbelief that alliances can be formed between men and women for gender equality… since the growth of an autonomous women's movement, the main impetus for reform has been located in women's groups, not mixed groups” (p. 26). Despite this disbelief in the possibility of collaboration between pro-feminist men and women for gender equality, these alliances are being built and sustained. Exploring the role of the dominant group in creating alliances, Pease (2010) states “it should be remembered that members of oppressed groups should be the ones who determine who
constitutes an ally and who does not” (p. 180). For Pease, pro-feminist men must be accountable whilst also understanding the legitimate concern and potential lack of interest from women feminists in building alliances.

It should be noted I will sometimes refer to partnerships and alliances interchangeably, as this was useful terminology during the interview process. Avila (1997) finds it useful to differentiate between partnerships and alliances, stating that alliances are “reciprocal, negotiated agreement(s) to support each other’s goals, even though these may not be shared goals” (p. 121). For instance, she states partnerships tend to be the “result of an agreement between two political entities to work together towards a shared goal” (p. 121). These conceptions are both useful in broadly identifying collaboration and engagement strategies pro-feminist men are using in their work, as opposed to assessing formal partnership agreements or processes. While Flood (2001) explores the importance of cross-gender partnerships in the context of men’s anti-violence advocacy, he does not interrogate the quality of these alliances and this is problematic.

Indeed pro-feminist organizing must inherently possess a shared goal of challenging hegemonic structures and working under the umbrella of the feminist movement. Women feminists are well versed in asking “who gains” and how then can the feminist movement gain from pro-feminist men’s support? Avila (1997) stresses the need to revitalize the feminist movement through “more systematic and strategic alliances and partnerships.” She goes on to state that “alliances and partnerships have been treated in a relatively unthought-out, polemical and reactive way. As a result the movement has failed to develop concrete ideas for how to take political action in a feminist manner” (p. 120). While Avila discusses gains “within movement” alliances of the feminist movement, she does not consider men’s pro-feminist organizing as an
explicit alliance or one that is capable of supporting the feminist movement. While I view solidarity and alliance-building between pro-feminist men and women’s rights networks as critical, I do not see these as replacing or reducing the importance of women-to-women, or (pro-feminist) men-to-men networks and alliances. Both types of alliances are crucially important. Men’s pro-feminist organizing and pro-feminist men need to not only form, but maintain strong bonds and engagement with women feminists and women’s rights organizations. Pease (2010) notes the relational feature of accountability, as “accountability usually occurs when those with less power are accountable to those with more power. In challenging privilege and oppression, this is reversed… hence the work by privileged groups must be accountable to the oppressed” (p. 182). This also means that women’s partnership building with men is not instrumental in ensuring a feminist agenda and women’s human rights in the same way as it is for pro-feminist men’s based organizations.

Gender relations are inherently rooted in power and affect the ways in which alliances are forged and maintained. Pease (2010) stresses the need to consider power differences within coalitions, but does not explicitly state these differences are rooted in unequal gender relations. Beamish and Luebbers (2009) explore social movement dynamics of coalition building across social movement organizations. They state that “clashes between movements over structural, ideological, resource issues have been well-documented as opposed to ‘cultural differences’ on collaboration/coalition-building within and across movements” (p. 647). I consider these “cultural differences” rooted in men’s “gendered and social realities” and their relevance for pro-feminist men who must be consistently reflexive and interrogate their personal privilege (Pease, 2010).
Men’s pro-feminist organizing has been explored as having a significant role to play in supporting the feminist movement (Pease, 2010; Flood, 2001, 2011). Aligned with Avila (1997) I will broadly explore the feminist movement as “the sector of the women’s movement, which is working to transform gender relations, whose actions focus on emancipation and equality for women” (Avila, 1997, p. 117). Avila states “the feminist movement is going down the path of dialogue, even though there are differences and divergences on how and with whom to even enter into such dialogue” (p. 119). Similar to Avila, Crowe stresses the need for women’s voice and experience to lie at the core of this dialogue. Crowe (2011) states that “feminism is gynocentric: it is a response to the androcentrism of mainstream culture, including prevailing views of justice and fairness” (Crowe, 2011, p. 49). This raises the question, how can men who work within the feminist movement add richness and meaning without dominating or trivializing women defined priorities and agendas? Looking within the feminist movement, women’s rights networks are conceptualized as representing wide ranging organizations (both formal and informal) dedicated to the promotion of women’s human rights and in this sense they are explicitly feminist.

1.3 Literature Review: Perspectives on Men in the Feminist Movement

1.3.1 The (Depoliticized) Men’s Movement: On the Margins of Feminism

Men’s pro-feminist organizing has arisen alongside a backlash against feminism consisting of anti-feminist and men’s rights groups (Faludi, 1991). Some of these men’s rights groups have claimed ownership to a growing men’s movement. Exploring the ideology behind the backlash, Lingard and Douglas (1999) for example state:
For men’s rights advocates, social power is distributed across the private and public realm, they cannot claim to be any more oppressed than men, or more to the point, oppressed by men, as both social spheres have their own privileges and disadvantages—different but equal in their complimentary relation to one another (p. 20).

According to Connell (2000) a men’s movement is inherently problematic and impossible as the term “movement” implies an oppressed or marginalized group organizes for social equality, negating men’s ability to have a movement of their own that is genuinely progressive. Alternately, Hagan (1992) has a rosier view of the men’s movement, and would likely consider pro-feminist men inside this sphere, he explores the men’s movement as consisting of “men who are prepared to work in solidarity with women to create a new society liberated from patriarchy” (p. 14). Messner (1997) supports Connell’s (1995) view that “pro-feminist activism among men is best accomplished not through a “men’s movement” but in schools, in political parties, in labor unions, and professional organizations, in workplaces, in families, and through supportive alliances with feminist and other progressive organizations that are working for social justice” (p. 102). Supportive alliances seem like an after thought in Messner’s statement, and I would argue need to be inherent in all spheres of influence he mentions above. Flood (2007) divides the men’s movement’s agendas in terms of “five overlapping strands: men’s liberation, anti-sexist or pro-feminist, men’s rights and fathers’ rights, spiritual and mythopoetic, and Christian” (p. 419). Not surprisingly these very different, and somewhat incompatible, men’s agendas complicate perceptions of men’s engagement in the feminist movement.

The existence of men’s rights groups fuels a disabling climate for social and gender justice advocacy. Faludi (1991) traces the backlash against feminism and women’s rights in the
United States, citing the “New Right Movement” as being the cause. She states, “New Right Leaders were the first to articulate the central argument of the backlash- that women’s equality is responsible for women’s unhappiness” (p. 230). Some women were also members of this “New Right Movement”. One influential member was Beverly Lattage who said, “feminism is more than an illness, it is a philosophy of death.” (p. 239). The “New Right Leaders” were on a “witch-hunt” according to Faludi, whose political message now informs deep rooted gender discrimination, and the view that feminism is “turning women into greedy yuppies and turning women into welfare mothers” (p. 242). With such blatant hatred and contempt for women’s liberation and equality just decades ago, it should be of little surprise that women feminists are wary of the intentions of men who claim to be feminists or feminist supporters. Similar to Faludi, Connell (2005) explores the “opponents of feminism” in the United States, mentioning Warren Farrell (1993) and Christina Hoff Sommers (2000), purporting to represent the voices of men and boys, who blame feminism for injustice. Men and boys, they argue, “are the truly disadvantaged group and need supportive programs in education and health, in situations of family breakup, and so forth. These ideas have not stimulated a social movement, with the exception of a small-scale (though active and sometimes violent) ‘father’s rights’ movement in relation to divorce” (p. 1806). While Connell (2005) is not overly concerned about their impact as a “movement” per se “neoconservative mass media has given them international circulation. They now form part of the broad neoconservative repertoire of opposition to “political correctness and to social justice measures” (p. 1806). This environment clearly complicates alliance-building between male and female feminists.

In exploring this rationale for men joining the women’s liberation in the 1970’s, Sadker (1975) positions men’s engagement in terms of rights and privileges, as opposed to building
men’s accountability to promoting women’s rights as a human rights project. Misguidedly, he stresses the benefits men would gain from women’s liberation, specifically a “reduction of the psychological stresses and restrictions experienced by many working husbands and home-based wives.” He goes on to state further benefits of women’s liberation which can “help to liberate men from the economic stresses and restrictions of being the sole family wage earner, and can even lead to a more satisfying retirement” (p. 314). I would argue this is an anti-feminist position, and if the feminist movement is to lead to gender transformation and rejection of hegemonic structures, women’s empowerment must be the backbone, as opposed to the ‘rights and privileges’ men will gain from feminism. The terminology Sadker (1975) utilizes diminishes women’s oppression and stresses “men’s right” to women’s liberation, ultimately to “liberate” men.

The denial of women’s oppression lies at the core of how hegemonic structures are maintained. Alternately, the ideology behind men’s pro-feminist organizing has concentrated on prioritizing and enhancing women’s rights priorities. Messner (1997) explores a timeline of men’s organized action in North America- ranging from explicitly anti-feminist to pro-feminist. Messner considers “men’s liberation groups” as the first organized response arising from the re-emergence of feminism in the early 1970’s. These groups spoke of oppression as not only affecting women, but men as well. This contributed to the Men’s Rights Movements in the late 70’s and early 80’s with men claiming to be the true victims of “prostitution, pornography, and dating rituals.” Robert Bly’s Mythopoetic movement in the 1980s illustrates this as it focused on all-men’s group retreats and spiritual growth, through which men could “heal” from the negative costs of masculinity. Thankfully, there have been vocal opponents to Bly’s “movement”. For example, Messner calls the Mythopoetic movement as “anti-intellectual,
apolitical, and lacking a feminist analysis” (p. 21). There is now increasing awareness among many, that progressive men’s engagement in women’s issues must be informed by feminist analysis, values, strategies and vision. This ultimately requires collaboration with and the leadership of women feminists and women’s rights networks to effectively contribute to gender transformation and social justice.

1.3. 2 The Pro-Feminist Male: A Paradoxical Identity

Pro-feminist men’s ability to deconstruct their male privilege lies at the core of the pro-feminist (male) identity, and is critical for developing meaningful alliances with women feminists. Additionally important is relating the personal to political, embedding male privilege in the sustenance of structural inequality, and power imbalances. This process, according to Bailey (1999) is clearly “not an easy thing to live with…knowing that the dominant group cannot get rid of their privilege, and they cannot use it without perpetuating dominant-subordinate relations to which they are opposed” (found in Pease, 2010, p. 184). From interviews with nine pro-feminist men, Cornish (1999) highlights a “complexity and awkwardness” of men’s relation to feminism in North America, while pointing to the value of a “post-patriarchal synergistic community” in forming and sustaining men’s pro-feminist identities. Why then do pro-feminist men commit to this politicized (and complex) identity? Kimmel (1995) elaborates on many ways in which pro-feminist men may justify their political position:

Pro-feminist men believe that the changes feminism has brought to women’s lives are positive for men as well as for women. Some of them support feminism because their moral commitments or political ideologies are based on the right of the individual to determine his or her life, or because of a commitment to a principle of equality that
demands that all people enjoy the same rights as citizens. Others support feminism because they are the sons of feminist women, the brothers of feminist sisters, the fathers of feminist daughters, the husbands of feminist wives, or the friends of feminist women. (p. 30).

In other research with pro-feminist men, White (2010) interviewed two African American pro-feminist men, who had each founded their own pro-feminist men’s organizations. The mission of their organization speaks to the inherent tensions pro-feminist men experience “trad[ing] feelings of guilt, shame, inadequacy and anger with empathy, compassion and pride through feminist collective action” (Goldrick-Jones, 2002; Katz, 2006). Holmgren (2011) interviewed 28 Swedish men aged 20-34, who would identify as “pro-feminist, or pro-gender equality”. It’s worth noting that relative to other countries Sweden is known for being particularly progressive and does not shy away from gender equality politics. From conversations with these “pro-feminist men” a common feature was the “reflexivity concerning their own subject position as men and as (pro) feminists in which self-understanding is central” (p. 372).

This reflexivity must challenge men’s sense of entitlement, for example Rosenblum and Travis (1996) state that “the sense of entitlement that one has a right to be respected, acknowledged, protected and rewarded- is so much taken for granted by those in non-stigmatized statuses, that they are often shocked and angered when it is denied them” (p. 141). Pro-feminist men must consciously work to deconstruct their male privilege and this sense of entitlement if they are to engage meaningfully with women’s rights networks and women feminists. How then can pro-feminist men engage with women feminists and women’s rights networks in authentic and egalitarian ways? Schacht and Ewing (2011) identify a unique set of
criteria for pro-feminist men to guide collaboration. The authors identify the following features, which is relevant to this research project:

- Acknowledge and give up their male privilege
- Willing to apply feminist principles to their personal lives
- Affirm that the elimination of oppression against women and people in general is a central priority
- Advocate for social and institutional change to promote equality and justice for women and all people
- Learn nonhierarchical forms of communication and decision-making
- Demonstrate respect for women and women’s space.

To summarize these features for pro-feminist men in being allies to women feminists, Schacht and Ewing point to the importance of the personal as political, commitment to social justice and a critical acknowledgement of male privilege and how this functions in feminist spaces.

This chapter has explored a “feminist rationale” for men’s pro-feminist organizing as a political project. A critical and sociological masculinities framework has been built to adequately explore the personal tensions pro-feminist men face, as they are both the objects and subjects within feminism. Men’s pro-feminist organizing continues to be a contested field, however there is increasing acceptance of the significance of building meaningful alliances with women’s rights networks. The broader social and political landscape of the existence of anti-feminist groups has shed light on the challenges pro-feminist men face in alliance-building with women feminists. Having explored the tensions of the pro-feminist male identity and the
broader context of anti-feminist groups, a deeper account of men’s journeys towards gender justice work will be discussed.
Chapter 2
Qualitative Inquiry: Feminist Research on Pro-Feminist Activism

2.1 Methodology

Due to the exploratory and personal nature of my research focus, a qualitative people-oriented approach (Patton, 1980) was used. Participant experience and critical self-reflection lie at the core of my research, grounded in “exploration, discovery and inductive logic” (Patton, 1980). I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants. This ensured a degree of “depth, detail and meaning at a very personal level of experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 18). Using semi-structured interviewing also provided flexibility in building rapport or asking for elaboration with participants. Through this approach, I was able to engage in a knowledge-building process (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2006) with participants. Patton elaborates on the holistic nature of qualitative inquiry as it “strives to understand a phenomenon as a whole. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts” (49). This holistic and people-oriented methodology is significant for my focus, as participants’ self-reflections offer critical context and ground their wider experience in gender justice and alliance-building with women’s rights networks.

2.1.2 Research Focus

Through semi-structured interviews with five men active in pro-feminist organizing, I explore their personal and political experience navigating the feminist movement, and building alliances with women’s rights networks. Participants’ reflections are contextualized in an increasingly competitive environment for donor funds and the emergence of anti-feminist groups. The participants are engaged in pro-feminist organizing based in Brazil, Canada, United States,
South Africa, and Pakistan and thus come from diverse socio-political contexts. All participants’ work (either consulting or full-time) within the non-profit sector dedicated to various women’s human rights issues. It should be noted that this research project explores their views as individual men and not as representatives of their organizations.

**Research Questions:**

At a personal level, how are participants navigating the complex terrain of the feminist movement as men? How do they relate, and/or identify with the feminist movement?

What were key formative experiences, which solidified their current passion and commitment to gender justice work?

To what extent do men view alliance-building with women’s rights organizations as central to their work?

Given the increasing competition for donor funds and emergence of anti-feminist groups, how are pro-feminist men building alliances and collaborating with women’s rights networks? How can pro-feminist men enhance their current alliances and partnerships to be strategically aligned with the feminist movement?

While it is useful to understand how partnerships with women’s rights networks are articulated organizationally, the intent of this research project is to provide insight into men’s individual experiences and views of their pro-feminist identities and alliances. The views of female feminist activists are not germane to this research and were not sought. It cannot be presumed that women’s rights activists and feminists would have the same perspectives on men’s engagement, challenges and approaches for enhancing alliance-building between pro-feminist men and women’s rights networks. It is hoped this research project will be of interest and use to
all those concerned with achieving gender justice, and in particular to men active in the feminist movement who wish to critically examine their role in this work and to enhance their current strategic alliances and partnerships with the feminist movement.

2.1.3 Utilizing a Self-Reflective and Feminist Approach

I applied a feminist approach throughout the interviewing process and data analysis, by being constantly reflexive in terms of my self-location and the political aims of this research. Nagy Hessie-Biber (2012) explores reflective researchers as “grappling with their social biography and its role in the research process, they find that ideological and personal beliefs muddy the water of knowledge production” (p. 561). An additional important element of feminist research is that of positionality as the “recognition of shifting nature of power relations from site to site” (Nagy Hessie-Biber; 2012, p. 563). Upon reflecting on my positionality throughout the research process, while all research participants were male, I did not feel a difference in power, which would normally result from my identification as a female researcher, and the male participant. I believe this is in part stems from their explicit personal and professional commitment to gender equality. I am cognizant that due to patriarchy and structured male privilege there is a cultural tendency to “reflect men at twice their natural size” (Cline and Spender, 1987). While my research highlights the voices of male participants, I listen and critically reflect as a feminist researcher who engages with critical men’s studies and pro-feminist perspectives on men and masculinities.

In exploring my feminist approach to research, I must tackle my own (evolving) relationship with feminism. Heath’s (1987) definition of feminism strongly resonates with me, as he relates feminism to a process of becoming a feminist, acknowledging it is a
“social-political reality, a struggle, and commitment” (p. 1). In a sense feminism is re-created, and for Heath, “women feminists are truly the ‘subjects’ of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force” (p. 2). I am empowered by this definition, as feminism will grow with me, and I with it. Indeed my feminism has shifted many times throughout the process of research writing, as in the past I’ve had limited engagement and dialogue with pro-feminist men. While women have been considered as “subjects” of feminism exploring men’s pro-feminist perspectives addresses the question, how can men contribute to “proposals for change” in meaningful, authentic ways which do not seek to dominate women’s inherent right to lead the feminist movement.

Ramazanoglu (2002) elaborates on “gendered social realities” as being essential within feminist methodology. Acknowledging men as gendered beings is critical in my research- as they navigate the complex terrain of being a pro-feminist man active in the feminist movement. Nagy speaks of feminist research as “excavating”, in a sense digging up new knowledge, which did not exist before (Online interview, Sage Publications, 2009). While there is no research method that is uniquely feminist (Ramazanoglu, 2002, p.15) there is a common thread of a “shared political and ethical commitment that makes [researchers] accountable to a community of women with moral and political interests in common” (Code 1991; Nelson 1993, found in Holland, p.16). At the core of these political interests lies structural change and women’s liberation in all spheres of life. I am also guided by a critical recognition of structured male power- however I continue to be inspired by the positive ways in which men themselves are challenging these structures through building solidarity with women’s rights networks.

I am aware of my self-location as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual woman from relative privilege from the Global North. My interest and inspiration in this topic initially arose
from professional experience as I led a literature review on engaging boys and young men for gender equality with a major development agency. My professional experience has been a primary influence in my decision to pursue a thesis on this currently very topical and highly contested area. At a personal level I have conflicting emotions and beliefs on men’s engagement in feminism. Having attended workshops on how to engage men and boys for gender equality, and found myself feeling slightly patronized by the male workshop facilitator, as he stressed the importance of not shaming or guilting men for their male privilege, and how efforts should build on the strengths and opportunities for male engagement. It seemed as if we as women, shouldn’t make men feel “too” badly, and should staunchly hold on to the all too familiar (and destructive) belief that men can change. My personal resistance paired with a belief in the necessity for male engagement peaked my curiosity.

Prior to my professional research experience on men and masculinities, I led anti-violence workshops with a small non-profit women’s rights organization in India. While the women participants were engaged and felt the sessions were significant, they continuously told me to hold sessions with their husbands! I strongly believe that many men are able and interested in playing more authentic, deliberate and committed roles to support feminist social movements. Leyland (1987) explores the personal disjoint and confusion of being a woman feminist taking on masculinity studies while feeling as if she has abandoned feminism. I continue to struggle with this, as my research is based on the voices and experiences of men. This exclusive focus on pro-feminist men however is an important exploration as they inherently have institutional privilege as men, but can also utilize this privilege to promote the women’s rights agenda. Wetherell and Griff (1991) provide a thoughtful rationale on their research on men and masculinities, interviewing male social scientists stating:
Our selection is certainly not meant to imply that the main impetus for work on masculinity has come from men. Selection is a result of the ‘academic’ and ‘political’ activities of feminists that the gendering of men emerged as an issue in the social sciences and elsewhere” (p. 363).

2.1.4 Participant Recruitment

Men’s pro-feminist organizing is a small yet strong force—few men having experience building alliances with women’s rights networks. So the group from whom I could recruit participants with the following criteria was not large:

- Identifies as a man currently working in the field of gender justice/gender equality work (can encompass wide-ranging thematic focus, for example: anti-violence, sexual and reproductive health, economic justice)
- Has experience in building partnerships and alliances with women’s rights networks

For the purpose of my research, I will consider the participants as part of the field of men’s pro-feminist organizing described as a multi-faceted field of men working in organizations dedicated to gender equality, gender justice and/or women’s rights. Men’s pro-feminist organizing encompasses a wide range of activities, from developing advocacy campaigns, delivering training to men/boys on gender equality, engaged in policy reform, or developing educational tools. All of the selected participants have extensive experience working in this field.

Due to the relative infancy of the field of masculinity and development, it was challenging to recruit participants who have had experience working in partnership with women feminists/networks. Through one of my professional networks, I obtained the contact information
for Matt, Chris and Daniel, and 2 other potential research participants. Matt, Chris and Daniel accepted my request for participation, with the other two men unresponsive. Upon reviewing my research synopsis, Matt recommended I speak with Saghir and Arasu, both of whom confirmed their interest and participation. I had never directly worked or met any of the participants, except for one—who I worked with briefly on a masculinity training resource. A short synopsis of my thesis proposal (Appendix A) was sent through email so they could consider participating (Appendix B for email text). Interview times were scheduled, and four individual interviews were held over Skype and one in person. All participants emailed their signed consent for participation (Appendix C for email text) prior to interviews, which took place from September-November 2011. All interviews were audio recorded over Skype using a call recorder on my laptop and securely stored. Passwords were created to access the audio recordings and transcribed files. I created an open-ended set of questions and supplementary questions. I applied an informal and conversational approach to the interviews, and asked some participants additional specific questions to gain clarification, elaboration or build rapport. Responses from interviews were carefully transcribed and reviewed for emerging themes, commonalities and unique aspects of men’s experience.

2.2 About the Male Participants

Matt

Coming from a privileged background, Matt grew up in a suburb outside of Toronto, Canada. After completing high school, he attended Queen’s University in hopes of becoming a tax lawyer, however this aim was displaced through his increasing interest in social justice and gender issues. After graduating from university, he worked for an HIV/AIDS organization and hospice in Toronto for 5 years. Continuing in the non-profit world, Matt ran a youth shelter for
another 5 years. With a strong background in multi-faceted social justice issues; poverty, housing, masculinity and gender, Matt took on the role as Executive Director at a non-profit dedicated to promoting boys and men’s role for anti-violence. The organization is now functioning across the globe, sparking local anti-violence initiatives.

**Chris**

Currently based in South Africa, Chris considers his upbringing strongly affected by white middle class heterosexual society in South Africa. As a youth Chris was active in anti-apartheid activism and moved to where his family relocated. Chris studied at University of Berkley University where he worked on an anarchist newspaper collective. Chris has also worked in the US on anti-imperialist activism, as well a volunteer counselor for men who were perpetrators of violence. Chris now works for a leading non-profit organization (mixed race) based in South Africa, focused on advocacy, policy reform and programming with boys and men for gender justice and the promotion of women’s human rights.

**Daniel**

Based in Brazil, Daniel has a rich background in masculinity, development and anti-violence. At the age of 18, Daniel participated in non-formal men’s groups on masculinity, sexuality during his college studies in Engineering. After completing his engineering degree, Daniel turned his focus to attaining a degree in Psychology, however was fascinated with issues of masculinity, therefore pursued a Masters in Gender Studies in Rio de Janeiro. Daniel has worked with a leading research, programming and advocacy non-profit organization focused on male engagement for gender equality in Brazil for the last 10 years, and is now completing his
PhD dissertation relating to masculinity, gender and development. He also brings experience working in Central America and Africa on masculinity issues.

**Arasu**

A strong child rights advocate, Arasu has extensive experience in grassroots programming in India—particularly working with women to improve their political representation and human rights. Arasu also has extensive experience working with boys and young men specifically on challenging hegemonic masculinity and promoting gender justice. As an advisor for UNICEF for many years, Arasu brings with him a strong focus on a life cycle approach in working with boys and young men to promote gender equality and the rights of children.

**Rahim**

Initially from Pakistan, Rahim grew up in a higher caste family. Rahim has a broad background in social justice issues, working first in child labour, whereby gender considerations became increasingly evident. He continued in the development sector, working for ILO and Plan. Rahim had a yearning to focus on the structural causes of inequality, and worked for the Pakistani police for many years, facilitating gender sensitivity workshops for both men and women police officers.

2.3 **Reflections on the Interview Process**

There is a possibility that men will not be comfortable expressing more negative or controversial views on engagement with women’s rights groups or exploring their personal relationships with women feminists to a female interviewer. If I had been a male interviewer,
the responses may have differed. As the interviews largely took place over Skype, there were some connectivity and technology issues, however I was careful to review unclear dialogue on the call recorder. It should be noted I have a working relationship with one of the participants, however I feel that because of this I received very honest and deep reflections from him. This interview also was in-person adding a more personal feel to the interview. As the interviews took place over Skype- I first wanted to introduce myself, how I became interested in this topic, and the general themes I would like to cover. I think this was instrumental in creating a rapport and a comfortable (virtual) environment for full and frank accounts of men’s experience. It is worth mentioning that participants had different views and opinions of the term “men’s movement” or “men’s groups”, some associating these terms as being supportive to feminist movements, and other linking it to anti-feminist sentiments. As there are a limited number of men within this field, I’m acutely aware of the potential response to their critiques of women’s rights networks and towards the broader men’s movement. To mitigate this, I have used pseudonyms when quoting, however I felt a short biography was important to building context for my research, and important when considering their perspectives.
Chapter 3
A Few Good Men: Diverse Paths, United in Purpose

3.1 Introduction

In this section I explore key experiences male participants identified in fostering their passion for gender justice and masculinities work. After detailing their journeys which led them to embrace feminism, I then go on to explore the ways in which the men are navigating the inherent tensions of practicing feminism as men. It is worth noting that all participants have higher education and would identify as being relatively privileged. The participants come from various countries (Pakistan, India, Brazil) and two of the participants identify as White (Canada and South Africa). Their stories vary tremendously and reflect the participants’ varying social and cultural backgrounds. Interestingly, the men highlighted diverse stories from various stages of their lives; in their childhood, during adolescence and young adulthood that contributed to their growing commitment to and support of feminism.

3.2 The Power of Experience: Men’s Reflections

Comparing qualitative research to that of story telling, Creswell (1998) relates the researcher to an “active learner who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an expert who passes judgment on participants” (20). I found myself adopting this “story-teller role” as men described poignant and formative experiences from their gender justice work. While I hadn’t explicitly asked participants to recall a story, interviews inevitably started in this way and seemed to emerge organically. I have selected these stories based on their importance to the men in initially fostering a passion for their work in gender equality, masculinity and anti-violence work.
One participant, Daniel reflects on a story his father told him:

My daddy is from North East Brazil. He [his father] started to work with his daddy [his
grandfather] in plantation, agriculture. In the first week of work, his father gave him a
pack of cigarettes... he was 8 years old. From my grandfather, that was a sign that he
wasn’t a child anymore, he’s a man. This story came into my life many many times. I was
fascinated by them. What are the rituals I should expect in my life to become a man?

This event sparked his interest and curiosity regarding masculinity and identity, and sustained a
long-term fascination regarding the meaning of manhood.

While Daniel initially contemplated notions of masculinity, Rahim had an experience as a
young adult, which made him reflect upon his class and privilege, not necessarily his gender.
Reflecting on his experience as a student in 1992, when he was coming home on public
transportation and a young man grabbed his bag. While Rahim thought his bag was being
stolen, the young man wanted to carry the bag for him as Rahim was from a higher caste. This
instance led Rahim to acknowledge his class privilege and proved to be personally
transformative. Male privilege is both a process and outcome of patriarchy, and requires a
feminist deconstruction from men themselves (Kimmell, 1998).

Matt reflected on specific events from his university experience, which made him start to
interrogate his masculinity, power and privilege:

After high school I went to Queens University and it was the year after there was a big
scandal on campus. In 1989 two residences across from each other (men and women’s),
women put up ‘no means no’ banners outside their residence looking out to the men’s
residences, and a kind of war escalated with these banners. Men in the male residences
put up signs saying ‘no means she hasn’t had enough to drink”, ‘no means …some brutal
stuff… I had a first year professor in philosophy that was teaching from a very feminist
perspective. It was the first time ever I got a structural understanding of feminism, and the
fight for equality.
Matt goes on to explore the next steps in his journey in university as being particularly poignant and informing his current work:

I ended up running for student government and taking on a social issues platform and getting exposed to advocacy and equity seeking groups of all different stripes and issues and it was because of my understanding of feminism, this is also a career path I could follow, so… that led me down the path, and its because of learning about feminism in university.

Alternately, Chris stressed the importance of his romantic relationships with women who were feminists in developing his views on gender, and his current work in gender justice:

I lived in Bolivia when I left South Africa, as an exchange student where my family relocated. And I dated a woman who was in one of my classes at university. She was, without using the label, very clearly feminist, certainly a women’s rights activist. She was one of the few people who I dated during college who pushed me to think very very differently about gender.

Interestingly, Arasu was the only participant who spoke of his father taking on non-traditional roles as having an immense influence on his life and gender justice work. He reflects on his father “cooking for everyone and encouraging both boys and girls to take on an equal role.” It should be noted that participants’ stories are reflective of their socio-political contexts and locations.

3.3 Fostering Personal Transformation- A Belief and Excitement in the Possibility of Change

For three of the five participants witnessing and/or being able to foster other men’s personal transformation was a key motivator for their engagement in men’s pro-feminist organizing. One thing that became clear from all participants was a fervent belief in the possibility of social change, even though it “may be slow” (Arasu). Chris reflects:
“Some of the moments I’ve found the most privileged to be present, happened in those spaces where men had life changing experiences. That’s what’s kept me in the work, the sense of tremendous… there are rare moments where you can experience other peoples fundamental change. It always feels like an honour to be a part of that process.”

Rahim reflects on a similar experience working with the police force in Pakistan, quoting a participant from one of his gender workshops. “This is my 30th year in the police, I never got such an environment where I could sit and think- how we as men think and can change.”

Despite the resistance Rahim encountered from other men in the workshops, this was truly a transformative experience for him. Daniel reflects on an experience working with youth:

The Program H, its been based on researchers and direct work with young men. In 2003 we started to think about, if were talking about gender inequality and young men, it was interesting to get them together- young men and young women together discussing these questions. It was an amazing experience, there was one particularly… it was really amazing. There was a difference in perspectives; there were so many similarities in terms of their experience.

These moments of transformation reflect the diverse professional focus of the men in their work with the police force, youth, and adult men who have perpetrated violence against women. The commonality lies in witnessing and being able to foster other men’s personal transformation.

One of the major critiques of men’s engagement in the feminist movement has been the inward and depoliticized focus on men’s personal well-being and spiritual growth (Messner, 2011), however for the participants this was a crucial motivator for their gender justice work.

3.4 Men on Guard: Overcoming Guilt and Defensiveness

The issue of men’s guilt has been widely noted in literature related to men and feminism (Connell, 1993; 1972; 1997, Johnson, 1997). Pro-feminist men must negotiate the fact that “men are responsible for the continuing oppression of women- and until they grasp this responsibility they will always have trouble engaging with the feminist project” (Crowe, 2011,
Defensiveness arose as a key challenge, both interpersonally and in building authentic and political alliances with women’s rights networks. From our conversations it became clear that there are contradictions in being a pro-feminist man, as it requires critiquing the unequal power structures of which one is inherently a part. This is an extremely difficult process to navigate without being defeated by shame and guilt (Matt). Not allowing guilt to supersede one’s commitment to gender justice is critical if pro-feminist men are to support the feminist movement. Dworkin (1993) elaborates on overcoming guilt stating:

Hiding behind guilt, that's my favorite. I love that one. Oh its horrible, yes and Im so sorry. You have the time to feel guilty. We don't have the time for you to feel guilty. Your guilt is a form of acquiescence in what continues to occur. Your guilt helps keep things they way they are (p. 62).

Two of the five participants mentioned the issue of guilt and being defensive as a key challenge for being a pro-feminist man active in the feminist movement. Matt seems cognizant of the debilitating effects of shame and guilt, but not being consumed by it, he reflects:

I think the most important thing for men doing this work, is to not be defensive, it’s ok to be wrong and learn along the way, because we haven’t had that experience before. If you can hear those things and work on them and commit to not making the same mistakes again, I think that goes a long way. I’ll say it again- we’re sometimes so defensive as men in general when we’re challenged on some of this stuff, even more so when we’re doing this work and putting ourselves out there and being good guys…There’s some of that feeling, we just have to let it go, it’s not about us as individuals, it’s about a whole history of patriarchy and oppression, and if we get tied up in that we can’t do good work either…

In regards to engaging with women’s rights networks, Chris states: “We have to call for some integrity during these discussions, while trying hard not come off as defensive.”
Crowe (2011) hones in on the challenges pro-feminist men face, stating “it is tempting for men to shirk this burden by either becoming defensive- denying the existence or scope of the problem- or seeking solace in expressions of guilt. The task for pro-feminist men is to resist these twin temptations” (p. 50). While only several participants spoke about defensiveness as a challenge, it is critical to consider in understanding alliance-building with women’s rights networks. Rahim spoke of being “uncomfortable” at times, specifically in considering the prevalence of violence against women. Connell (1997) acknowledges discomfort amongst pro-feminist men, stating “I do not think men seeking progressive reforms of masculinity can expect to be comfortable, while we live in a world marked by gendered violence and inequality” (p. 65). From our conversations, it became clear that the challenge of taming defensiveness, particularly when engaging with women’s rights networks is a sustained one- and not easily resolved.

3.5 The Self-Reflective Pro-Feminist Male

Feminist discourse has largely centered on women’s ability to engage in self-reflection, and negated the importance of men’s ability to deconstruct their male privilege. Kuypers (1999) would argue for example that any deconstruction of male privilege and power must also be informed by the “interaction of race, class, sexuality, ability, age” (p. 60). This ability to engage in a process of continuous and critical self-reflection emerged as a consistent theme throughout the interviews, and important when considering alliance-building efforts, as men can never truly relinquish their privilege (Pease, 2010). The ability to critically reflect on one’s male identity in relation to patriarchy and the feminist movement emerged consistently amongst men. Chris reflects on two key experiences, which fostered significant learning and reflection. The first
involved a time during university when he was working on an anarchist magazine with his female colleagues who expressed feeling under-appreciated and silenced by the men: “That was a key moment in terms of us thinking about group processes, micro-dynamics of sexism and patriarchy”. Specific to issues of violence Chris reflects:

I think I had lots of questions about my own relationship to violence, and working with men on these issues in my capacity working as a volunteer counselor. Simply sitting outside of groups of men who are referred from the court. I found it incredibly interesting and rewarding experience.

Daniel spoke of taking part in informal men’s group discussions on what it means to be a man and issues of sexuality.

Something I wrote in my dissertation. When I was 18 I had a chance to participate in a men’s group in Rio. It was an informal group not linked to an organization, was a group of men interested in discussions on sexuality, what it means to be a man…I was 18.

Self-reflection for Daniel fuelled a curiosity to specialize in gender academically:

When I came to university for the second time, it was very clear that I wanted to work on men’s issues. I wasn’t sure about how, where, for me… I was just so fascinated in the construction of masculinity, and different meanings on masculinities.

Through self-reflection Matt considers the impact of feminism on his life:

I learned more about my own ability to make change in the world, I developed a far greater capacity for empathy and understanding of other people’s challenges and differences, my notions of tolerance and diversity were just blown right out of the water. So many things, that I can teach my kids that if I hadn’t gone through that process of understanding and all of those things have helped me in this job, and in gender justice work…

Matt spoke about feminism as a ‘gift’ demonstrating a sense of solidarity and appreciation for the power and potential of feminism. Crowe (2011) offers words of caution in focusing on the benefits of feminism to men, stating that this type of “cost-benefit analysis is besides the point”… and that while “feminism affords men the promise of social relationships with women
premised on mutual respect and equality”… “the point of feminism is to promote the well-being of women” (p. 50). Few masculinity theorists have been able to articulate this point as clearly and explicitly as Crowe; it is central to conceptualizing pro-feminist men’s engagement in feminism.

Being clear in one’s support for feminism as a male is clearly difficult, however it is essential. For Crowe (2011) men need to exert agency and “choose what side of the struggle they are on” (p. 50). This is a challenging process due to the societal stigma of being feminist-causing added fear of perception for men who identify as pro-feminist. Breen and Kabinsky (2008) found that feminist males were rated less favorably than non-feminist males (p. 299). This stigma was evident in my research as most of the men did not explicitly label themselves as feminist (or pro-feminist) - they did however strongly identify with feminist principles and values. Knowing that one is intrinsically part of hegemonic structures, while dedicating oneself to challenging these structures, is a difficult process to navigate. This critical self-reflection on their gendered identities, and masculinity, however, is the first step towards challenging gender inequalities (Greig, Kimmel, Lang; 2000).

Not surprisingly, how one self-identified in relation to the feminist movement varied amongst participants. I offered several identity labels to spark men’s thoughts, specifically; pro-feminist, feminist, male gender activist, however men were also encouraged to use any term they felt appropriate. Interestingly the participants’ resistance to answering the question was perhaps more telling than the answers themselves. The query of “who are you in relation to the feminist movement?” was met with a sense of frustration and not wanting to be engulfed in a debate on identity politics. Daniel, for example, states: “For me labels aren’t important, it’s beyond labels”. After probing more on this topic, participants cited being a “pro-feminist man”
(2 participants identified with this term), “male gender activist”, “human rights activist with strong focus on gender and non-discrimination”, and a “man dedicated to men and masculinities from a feminist lens”. While there are many ways for men to define themselves in relation to the feminist movement it is critical that an explicit commitment to feminist principles and values is stated.

Significantly, Rahim noted that all labels are rooted in a political standpoint, as he defined “pro-feminism” as a more politicized identity that assumes a collaborative role with women’s rights networks and women feminists. Alternately, another respondent felt that the ‘pro-feminist’ label creates an unnecessary divide between the “pro-feminist” man and “feminist” woman, furthering a division along gender lines. There were also varying perspectives on whether men could be feminist at all, as Arasu stated “honestly, I get sick of men who try to pretend to be feminists, just because you want to please the women’s movement?” This sense of “pretending” was evident in research conducted by Griffin and Wetherell (1991). From interviews with male and female psychologists and sociologists in the Global North, the purpose of which was gauge men’s relation to feminism, one participant of the study illustrated his positive perception on the “pro-feminist” label: “I would describe myself as pro-feminist. I think it’s cheeky for men to call themselves feminist. I think it’s really a bit pretentious, a bit arrogant or a bit unlikely” (p. 142). This is consistent with Heath (1987) who states “men’s relation to feminism is an impossible one” (p.1). Daniel reflects on the complexity of feminism for men, stating: “Feminism is an ideology for me. It’s guidance for us, in terms of gender equality, equal opportunity for men and women. But I know I’m saying this as a man.”

Chris demonstrates his belief that it is possible for men to be feminists. He states:
Feminism is about more than just being a woman, it’s about a set of principles and values and commitment to social justice. I would use the term ‘feminist’, I don’t step into the public domain and say ‘oh I’m a feminist’ because a lot of people misunderstand the term and it alienates a lot of people. However I feel very comfortable using that term to describe myself.

Most significantly, all participants acknowledge the complexity of the male feminist identity, and, while they had varied ways of defining themselves, a commitment to gender equality and social justice was at the core.

The questioning and awareness of male privilege were also evident amongst participants. In fact, Schacht and Ewing (2001) would argue that deconstructing male privilege is essential for pro-feminist men to build meaningful coalitions with women feminists (found in Pease, 2010, p. 181). My own research has shed light on pro-feminist men’s capacities for such critical interrogation of male power and the gendered social realities which they face in both their personal and professional lives. The feminist identity is a political one, and is particularly relevant for pro-feminist men as they commit to supporting the feminist movement, while paradoxically benefitting from the patriarchal dividend, as they can “never truly relinquish privilege” (Pease, 2010, p. 184). Despite these complexities, Pease (2010) would stress that pro-feminist men, as members of the “privileged group need to be accountable to the oppressed” (p. 182). Exploring these contested and conflicting identities male participants grapple with, provides a more holistic account of the challenges male participants face in building alliances with women’s rights networks.
Chapter 4
Towards a “Gender Equality Agenda”

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a holistic and critical analysis to the experience of selected pro-feminist men active in building alliances with women’s rights networks. While the importance of cross-gender partnerships for pro-feminist men have been validated (Flood, 2011) there is little research exploring the ways pro-feminist men perceive alliance-building and partnerships across gender lines. Participants’ perceptions on the value of women’s rights networks to their work will be explored, as well as what these alliances look like in practice. An increasingly competitive funding environment and the emergence of anti-feminists groups are greatly affecting the ways in which pro-feminist men are building alliances, which necessitate an exploration. Despite these challenges, men are committed to building solidarity and enhancing collaboration with women’s rights networks. Finally, men’s reflections on how to enhance the collaboration and quality of relationships with women’s rights networks will be explored.

4.2 Alliance-Building with Women’s Rights Networks: “The Foundation” of Men’s Pro-Feminist Organizing

Despite the existence and emergence of anti-feminist and men’s rights groups, efforts to build solidarity and alliances with women’s rights networks seem to be prevalent amongst the majority of men’s pro-feminist organizations. A recent study found that nearly 75% of all respondents of male-based gender organizations reported collaborative relationships with women’s organizations (Kimball, Edleson, Tolman, Neugut, Carlson, n.d., p. 12). One common thread across regions was the high degree of collaboration with women’s organizations. The
authors note “while the high degree of reported collaboration is encouraging… self-reported collaboration does not mean that these organizations are doing an effective job in these partnerships” (p. 19). The results of the study indicate the ‘presence of some collaboration, [however] does not negate the possibility for resource competition, dominance, or dilution of efforts than may continue to occur even when organizations work together” (p.19).

How then do pro-feminist organizations articulate their relationship with women’s rights networks? Upon reviewing external websites such as the White Ribbon Campaign and Sonke Gender Justice, it is significant that they make explicit their commitment to partnering with women’s rights networks:

We acknowledge the expertise and central role of women in challenging violence against women. With tremendous heroism, they pioneered this work; they set up support programs for women and pushed for social awareness and legal change. It is essential for our local groups to have an ongoing dialogue with women's groups in their community. Real progress will only be achieved in partnership with women’s organizations.

(Taken from White Ribbon Campaign’s website).

A broader statement on alliance-building comes from Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa.

Sonke works closely with a range of organisations and individuals including women’s rights organisations, social movements, trade unions, government departments, sports associations, faith-based organisations, media organisations, university research units and human rights advocates…women, sexual minorities, young people, refugees, migrants and other relevant stakeholders are represented in Sonke’s governance structures (p. 15).

(Taken from Sonke Gender Justice Annual Report, 2007)

These statements represent an increasing cooperation between men and women’s rights organizing. Connell (2003) states “this cooperation can be an inspiration to grass-roots workers, and a powerful demonstration of women's and men's common interest in a peaceful and equal society” (p. 26). Connell re-iterates the value of the term alliance as it “preserves autonomy for
women's groups, in pre-empting a tendency for any one group to speak for others, and in defining a credible role for men. In some early attempts to formulate a gender equality strategy for men, the role defined was that of dependent auxiliaries to the women's movement. This was not a position that attracted many men as supporters, it downplayed the distinctive experiences and resources that men might bring to the struggle for gender equality” (p. 1817). Connell argues that an "alliance" approach allows these resources to be used, and helps in defining a position of dignity for the men as well as the women involved in gender reform” (p. 26).

Cornwall et al. (2000) similarly support this alliance approach as ‘coalition -building and support can create and strengthen new forms of solidarity across the gender divide” (p. 6). What exactly consists of this collaboration? Lingard et al. (1999) stress a ‘politics of alliance’ as essential to pro-feminist work, given that “any mass men’s movement is more likely recuperative rather than progressive in character. The focus needs to be on the dismantling of men’s solidarity, rather than its reconstruction” (p. 170). The politics of alliance is increasingly vital as funding for gender equality and women’s rights is increasingly threatened.

Men’s pro-feminist organizing has been explored in terms of its political relationship to the feminist movement and women feminists. Participants had experiences working with wide-ranging women’s rights networks and a strong consensus emerged on the importance of these alliances. Arasu describes the diversity of his engagement with women’s rights networks:

I’ve always worked with women’s movements- from the village committees to municipal committees. I worked on domestic violence. I can’t exist without a handy relationship with women’s movement.

Rahim is very clear in his support for the feminist and women’s movement, and the impossibility of separating men’s pro-feminist organizing from the women’s movement.
I always worked when the work was housed in the women’s movement. That was my strategy. The work, which I did, was either with child rights or women’s movement. I didn’t have enough space to separate this work. … so my focus is how we can work while being within the women’s movement. Once you start looking at this work as separate, than I have a fundamental disagreement there. This is all gender equality work. I have issues on the term gender, what about transgender? When I started in funding, I would always give contracts to women’s rights organizations.

Significantly, Rahim problematizes the separation of men’s pro-feminist organizing from the feminist movement, and highlights the necessity of strong collaboration. In fact, Barkan et al’s (1979) definition of “within movement collaboration” can be related to men’s pro-feminist organizing; they state that “protest groups and organizations, with relatively aligned causes and goals engage in joint planning and action” (cited in Beamish and Leubers, p. 647). Men’s pro-feminist organizing would fall into this category, rather than cross movement with women’s rights networks as pro-feminist men are ultimately working towards “shared goals” of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Consistent with the idea of pro-feminism being under the umbrella of the feminist movement, Matt reflects on the importance of engaging with women’s rights networks: “Partnerships with women’s organizations are a fundamental piece of our work…nothing we do here we can do without working in partnerships without women’s rights organizations.” When asked how alliances could address resistance amongst women feminists and women’s rights networks, the term ‘resistance’ itself was called into question. Chris states: “Yes, but I wouldn’t use the word resistance, I would say legitimate concern, curiosity.” This statement by Chris is significant as he demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of men working within the feminist movement from a woman’s perspective, which Crowe (2011) would argue is essential for men to engage in the feminist project, as they “must move beyond self-interest and treat the viewpoints and concerns of women as important in their own right” (p. 51).
Matt stresses the importance of partnership building with women’s rights networks:

It’s absolutely critical. If you don’t, you’ll never change the mind of people who resist. More importantly on the positive side, it’s a far more compelling case to funders, donors, and policy makers when you approach them in partnerships. We need to do work with women. We need to do work with men. It’s not either/or; it’s not one at the expense of the other, but it’s together.

All participants explicitly valued alliances with women’s rights networks, and found them central to their work in pro-feminist organizing. While it is important to gauge men’s perceptions of the value of alliance–building, “we must assess actions not just well-intentioned discourse of men’s pro-feminist organizations” (Messner, 1997). What then does this cooperation and collaboration look like?

4.3 Alliance- Building in Practice and Strategies for Collaboration

Alliance-building and collaboration between pro-feminist men and women feminists/women’s rights networks can take many forms. Funk (1993) explores multiple ways in which men’s groups retain accountability to the feminist movement and women’s human rights broadly; as they may “consult with women’s groups before initiating their campaigns, do not compete with women’s groups for funding or other resources, and build strong lines of communication and trust” (p. 125–6; 132–4). The importance of engaging with women feminists from the beginning, which Funk points to, seems prevalent amongst men’s experiences, and according to Chris, has political implications:

It would be politically astute to do it from the beginning. It’s hard to build relationships with credibility- you can’t say ‘no’ it’s not convenient for us right now… so for us we would struggle to get donor funds if we didn’t take these relationships seriously…

Daniel similarly speaks about the importance of engaging with women’s rights networks from the beginning:
For us, it was interesting, since the beginning... we were interested in having women participating on the discussions about young men, for us it was very important to have their perceptions and input. How can we promote a critical reflection in terms of gender equality with young men, and for this reason we've had women’s groups on board.

Matt stresses the importance of context for alliance-building:

It looks different in every relationship, what’s the context of it, what’s happening, and why you’re approaching each other is always unique. But at the same time there’s things we come to it every time, some of those things include basic stuff but it has to translate into action; recognizing your equal partners, recognizing that more often than not women’s organizations we’ve partnered with have been doing this work a lot longer than we have...

Matt also speaks of increasing interest and acceptance of male engagement for gender equality:

What’s more effective is doing good partnership work with organizations that are interested and willing and see the need to start to engage men and demonstrating the results of the partnerships and letting the results of partnership speak for themselves, this is more effective and power than 1000 panels me sitting on... I think if there are changes happening, it’s those pockets of resistance are getting smaller and smaller...

In addressing issues of resistance, Chris reflects on the internal workings and representation of women within his respective organization, pointing to a diversity of collaboration strategies:

We have 40% women staff, at senior level its 50% women, and our Board Of Directors we have a standing commitment to 50% women – representing women’s rights organizations and that’s always been the case. We've always stuck to this commitment to the Board when we develop new initiatives or written articles/reports- we pretty much always ask women rights colleagues to review them and propose changes. So all of our campaign materials were reviewed by a range of women’s rights organizations, the same with our other campaigns, and many of the articles we write...we participate very very actively in partnerships with women’s rights organizations. We co-train together, which builds trust amongst the organizations.

Chris highlights other strategies, which enhance his respective organizations ability to better understand the needs and priorities of local women’s rights networks:

If the organization doesn’t have a meaningful engagement and dialogue with women’s rights organizations within their local context and they aren’t informed of the priorities of the women’s rights orgs that’s a challenge. It could be an interesting exercise to ask people (our staff)- identify the top 5 priorities of women’s rights orgs in terms of HIV, or
GBV. I would bet that our staff can’t answer that question as well as they should. Even though we do have checks and balances in terms of accountability. We don’t work day in day out alongside with women’s rights organizations. Where we have implemented joint projects- the conversation is- you drive to the workshop at night in the b and b- you have dinner together in the most rural areas- you rarely get into the complexity and nuances of the work. I don’t think we do that enough. Were now putting together an orientation process for new staff- whereby you shadow and spend time with practitioners from women’s rights orgs/shelters so that they’re more intimately aware of their needs and priorities of women’s rights organizations.

Of all the participants, Chris had the most extensive experience in building formal strategies of collaboration with women’s rights networks. He points to a challenge in ensuring the priorities of their women’s rights partners are well understood by all levels of their staff, and is vital for their work in mobilizing boys and men for gender justice.

Matt reflects on the diversity of partnership and alliance-building with women’s rights networks, stating:

I would say literally, in terms of formal partnerships there’s 2 dozen organizations we’ve formally partnered with, more broadly then that, that we’ve allied or supported would be 50-60 range of different organizations from around the world, from UN Women to on the ground women shelters in Brazil (likely more than 50-60 organizations).

Exploring the diversity of alliances and strategies men are utilizing within their organizations is significant in developing a more complete account of within movement collaboration between pro-feminist men and women’s rights networks. Conversations with men have illustrated numerous strategies pro-feminist men are utilizing. However, a deeper look at the function of the politics of space is required as men face challenges in building egalitarian and authentic alliances within a broader patriarchal system, which continues to legitimize their voice and experience over women feminists.
4.4 The Politics of Space: Alliance-Building Across Gender Lines

A significant debate which needs further exploration is how men ‘fit’ into the feminist movement and the gendered nature of the politics of space. Women-only spaces have been at the core of the feminist movement and are an “essential step on the way to imagining and ultimately creating a world where there is an alternative to patriarchy” (Ruby, 2003, p. 15). This raises the question, how can pro-feminist men enter without dominating these spaces, as male privilege can’t truly be relinquished (Pease, 2010). Feminist dialogue is grounded in the voices and experiences of women (Crowe, 2011) and is a crucial space, which resists and challenges male domination and patriarchy. Given that feminist spaces are sites of resistance, how can men meaningfully engage without intruding or dominating feminist space? (Ruddy, 2006, p. 6).

Rahim stated a desire for “men only spaces and shared spaces between men and women.” Ensuring these shared spaces are egalitarian and truly feminist remains a significant challenge, particularly as men must acknowledge that feminism is not really about them (Crowe, 2011). Ewing and Schacht (2011) propose a “threefold approach consisting of women’s space, men’s space and shared space” (p. 200). The ability of pro-feminist men to listen to women feminists, while a seemingly moot point, is a key challenge as men are “used to entering any discussion and automatically being heard” (Crowe, 2011, p. 39).

There is immense value in aspiring for these shared spaces, as Ewing and Schacht note that “shared spaces should also be created where feminist women and pro-feminist men come together to work cooperatively on projects” (p. 200). From interviews with participants, a key
challenge in these shared spaces was the ability to listen from women’s rights networks within working relationships. Chris reflects on his experience in navigating this shared space:

Lastly, we’ve had to do quite a lot of work with our staff to get through feelings of indignation when they’ve been in meetings with women’s rights groups - in some cases they’ve explicitly been told to be quiet, or ‘this is not your space, you’re here to listen’. We’ve had to lots of internal education - lets understand what’s going on there, how to respond to it. If you don’t do that work carefully, you can end up in a situation where there’s a reservoir of feeling hurt, surprised by the staff. So that’s a challenge as well.

This is consistent with Edward’s (2006) exploration of the “ongoing challenges that allies face and which include; figuring out when to speak, when to listen and when to remove themselves from the activist space” (as cited in Pease, p. 180). Alternately, Alilunas (2011) explores the ways in which men who take women’s studies courses navigate the “paradoxical space” stating they are “the physical bearers of much that is discussed within the room while also the symbol of that which chooses not to participate” (p. 210). This non-participation, however, is seemingly more prominent amongst men who would not identify as being pro-feminist or active in gender justice work. Daniel illustrates the challenge of listening, particularly for pro-feminist men:

There’s a moment where you groups are saying ‘I have my own agenda’ and we must respect differences and to listen to each other and sometimes we see problems relating to men and women in terms of listening. There were some groups were difficult to accept men in the scenario, in some moments for men its very difficult to listen, you are guilty for any imbalances because you’re a man. We need to learn to deal with.

Dreher (2009) elaborates on “ethical listening”, which is relevant here, and which consists of “not only the ability to understand the other, but also to be receptive to our own complicity with systems of privilege” (found in Pease, 2010, p. 179). Indeed “men who try to develop a politics in support of feminism, whether gay or straight are not in for an easy ride” (Connell, 1997, p. 65). Matt stresses the importance of “recognizing that as men doing this work we have to be conscious of privilege and power and space were taking up.” This self-reflexivity is essential
for shared space to remain feminist, and can allow for “ethical listening” between pro-feminist men and women feminists. Crowe (2011) states that “perhaps one of the most important things men can do to support feminism is to listen what women have to say… and must be ready to listen” (p. 51).

What role can donor funding/aid assistance play in promoting these shared spaces between pro-feminist men and women’s rights networks? This is particularly challenging as donor and funding requirements are “project-based” (Matt) and according to Daniel are “forcing a competitive kind of relationships/partnerships… its not healthy.” Cornwall et al. (2000) call for a “shift towards a development agenda in which inequalities, social justice play a central part to open up new spaces for engagement” (p. 6). While new spaces may be needed to accommodate pro-feminist men’s engagement, there must be a preservation of “women-only and feminist spaces and festivals as they are an essential step on the way to imagining and ultimately creating a world where there is an alternative to patriarchy” (Ruby, 2003, p.15).

4.4.1 A Space to Learn (and Unlearn) for Pro-Feminist Men

All participants expressed a strong belief in the necessity of learning from women’s rights networks and the feminist movement broadly. Daniel states: “Many women’s groups have strong experience in public policy, based on 30-40 years of feminism. I’m not saying we’re in the same moment, but of course can learn from their experience as well.”

Rahim refers to “men’s movement learning” being connected to the experience of the women’s movement:

We have to engage with the women’s movement, learning from last 50 years. This can feed into men’s movement learning. Lots of space for reflection and discussions. Some of
the initiatives are so symbolic. But we really have to see how men’s movement can showcase long-term changes among men. This won’t happen if we don’t learn from women’s movement.

Clearly, a one-off dialogue with women’s rights networks is not sufficient. Arasu states the need for more systematic and organized opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing to promote learning on both sides, and to tackle resistance:

The only way resistance is carried on is that if you can’t create more ongoing structures, which bring these groups together in a more coordinated way, and create mechanisms to address breakdown of communications. The resistance is completely based on prejudice and this can only be broken.

In “breaking down prejudice”, Arasu believes that stronger bonds can be forged between men’s pro-feminist organizing and both individual women feminists and women’s rights networks.

Daniel highlights the problem of listening for men in their collaboration with women feminists. He states: “There’s a moment where groups are saying ‘I have my own agenda’ and we must respect differences and to listen to each other and sometimes we see problems relating to men and women in terms of listening.”

Interestingly, Arasu was the only participant who brought up “unlearning”, stating “this might sound pro-feminist, but all our learning comes from there [the feminist movement] and my unlearning.” Undeniably there is much for pro-feminist men to unlearn as “mainstream discourse is designed to accommodate and value male points of view” (Crowe, 2011, p. 49).

Feminist space and discourse seeks to challenge this androcentric mainstream discourse which women need to continue to take ownership and lead the discussion. Participants seemed to have a critical understanding of “taking up space” (Matt), which is critically important in fostering authentic shared spaces with women feminists.
4.5 Working Across Silos and Towards Social Justice: The Potential of Men’s Pro-Feminist Organizing

Men’s pro-feminist organizing has been explored as a political project. McMahon (1993) points to a key challenge facing the field of masculinities as it has ‘retreated from a critical analysis of men’s attitudes and behaviours, neither politicizing the personal nor exploring the interpersonal dynamics of power and privilege within broader struggles for gender justice (as cited in Cornwall et al., p. 6). An exclusive focus on male sexual violence amongst pro-feminist men as the issue “tends to lead activists away from the engagement with structured inequality within social institutions such as workplaces, families and the state” (Messner, 1997, p. 55). More specifically, issues such as “pay equity, day care, parental leave and welfare reform has led to a politics of disengagement with issues that have the greatest potential for coalition building” (ibid, p. 55). For all the participants their work in pro-feminist organizing was considered a political project. Daniel stresses the inherent political nature of masculinities work, and points to a paradigm shift in men’s pro-feminist organizing as a political project:

I don’t understand when some groups of men say “we’re not political.” We are political all the time. Were working in a formal way on private issues, but sexuality, violence and fatherhood are public issues…and political issues. How can we move from Thursday night meetings in a church to public policy? This is our major challenge right now. There is a moment, and it’s quite interesting to see over the last 10 years, when we started those men’s groups it wasn’t clear what was the political agenda, we didn’t really have one. It’s much more… something related to personal. When we started to organize different men’s groups and networks, it’s necessary to say very clearly about our proposals, and our objectives, our relations with women’s groups…” Furthermore, ‘it’s very interesting to sit and drink together to talk about life, but we need an agenda. For me, it’s not a men’s agenda, we need a gender equality agenda.

A number of social change theorists have argued for the importance of “multi-issue coalitions aimed at addressing all forms of oppression as being fundamental for social justice
and political change” (Pease, p. 181). Flood (2001) is a strong proponent of the need to broaden support past single-cause alliances, stating that “anti-violence is fuelled by and itself perpetuates gender inequalities (and other forms of injustice), anti-violence work should be situated within a broader project of gender justice” (p.45). Similarly, Pringle (1995) advances the need to address other dimensions of oppression, which intersect with gendered domination, locating men’s work against violence within a broader anti-oppressive practice. (p. 150).

Participants shared this view that a multi-issue approach to broadening support for women’s rights issues is an important element for pro-feminist men’s engagement moving forward. Chris illustrates multi-issue coalitions and broadening support for women’s rights issues:

We are an active partner with ATHENA (Advancing Gender Equality and Human Rights in the Global Response to HIV/AIDS) network which is a global network looking at gender and HIV particularly working with HIV positive women, particularly working with positive women and creating policy dialogues for them. We participate very actively in that. We are a member of the Shokumesa campaign in South Africa, which is a women’s rights campaign (based on monitoring and evaluation of our gender based violence laws in South Africa). We’re also members of 1 in 9 campaign, which is another women’s rights campaign. We’re squarely situated in a broader network of gender justice organizations.

Daniel reflects on the need to work across social movements, not solely with feminist groups. Significantly, he elaborates on the political dimensions of multi-issue coalitions and broadening support for social justice:

For me, in terms of the political agenda- it’s not only political agendas with feminist groups, but there might be other agendas that might be interested for the men’s groups, I have called attention particularly for LGBT groups and children’s rights movement that we need to establish a dialogue in order to advance OUR agendas. If I have an agenda on fatherhood for me, it’s of course related to women, motherhood and children’s rights. For me, it’s kind of the same…we know we have many advances in the last 30 years, but if we want to go beyond that, we need to work together, in terms of gender based violence, fatherhood, employment, sexual exploitation etc.

Arasu regrets that “what has happened is that we’ve created so many silos, but we have to look
at the life cycle perspective in gender.” Having a strong child rights background, he was particularly concerned about the “need to consolidate work with girls and women” and that “one of the biggest challenges is for men’s organizations is to work with other human rights instruments- not just CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). An additional challenge Arasu mentions is for men’s pro-feminist organizing to tackle issues of economic justice specifically - a key issue which pro-feminist men are currently silent. According to Rahim, another sphere of which pro-feminist men are disengaged is working with those men in dominant and wealthy groups, which can politicize men’s pro-feminist organizing. He elaborates:

We need to work with men political leaders, and corporate sector we need to expand. Go to where the men are, this is where we need to engage. Its very easy to work with men who are disempowered or marginalized, but much more difficult to work with highly educated and in powerful positions. I don’t know how to change this.

The majority of advocacy and programming engages men from marginalized communities, and as Silberschmidt (2001; 2004; 2005) notes this may limit the attainment of gender equality. For Silberschmidt, she is skeptical that “poor frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities, who are not respected by their wives because of lack of financial support, who are blamed for their extramarital activities and whose self-esteem and masculinity are at stake, would be interested in engaging in the struggle for gender justice and gender equality” (found in in Cornwall, p. 99). Chris reflects on his experience challenging male elites and those in powerful positions, however it was a source of tension their women’s rights partners:

When we decided to go to equality court- our women’s rights partners weren’t convinced it was the right thing to do. We were convinced as an organization that it was the right thing to do- and that as a mandate to work with boys and men for gender equality, that we hold male politicians to account.
Chris raises a significant challenge in how pro-feminist men retain autonomy, while also working in collaboration and respecting differing political strategies of their women’s rights partners. For Chris, this was an important action for his respective organization to be explicit and speak out in defense for women’s rights; Chris was able to utilize his institutional privilege in promoting women’s rights and challenging a prominent male politician.

This section has explored both the immense importance and significant challenge pro-feminist men face in broadening support for multi-issue coalitions. In doing so, pro-feminist men can be more explicit in their commitment for social justice. The political disengagement from “radical and socialist” feminists (Messner, 1997) must be resisted, and the broader social justice project must be at the core of pro-feminist men’s efforts if structural change is to occur.

4.6 Beyond the Donor Agenda: Addressing the “Resource Question”

4.6.1 You Can’t Manage What You Don’t Measure

Complicating any dialogue on funding for gender equality work is the lack of statistics from donors, stifling a nuanced and honest discussion of ‘who gets what, and who benefits?’ Legatis (2012) briefly explores the need for transparency amongst donors, asking a critical question regarding the lack of publicly available gender-disaggregated data and critical assessments of the impact funding has had on women’s empowerment. Currently the only multi-lateral organization that provides the OECD with data on gender equality dimensions of its aid is the World Bank. Lydia Alpizar, the Executive Director of Association for Women’s Rights in Development cited two reasons for this lack of information. She problematizes the "limited
culture of accountability amongst donors and multilaterals on how their resources are used…and in other cases, we have not asked for the data" (p. 1). As the field of men’s pro-feminist organizing expands its scope and influence, the need to accurately assess donor-funding patterns for pro-feminist men relative to women’s rights networks is paramount.

Globally, men and boys continue to join the struggle for gender equality, and women’s human rights, however despite increasing interest, this engagement has remained small-scale and limited in impact and sustainability, reaching a relatively small number of men and boys (Peacock, 2010). Despite being small-scale, these men’s initiatives for gender equality are increasingly influential within the international development non-profit sector, particularly as the field becomes increasingly trendy and compelling for donors. Greig (2009) states “there is now a growing interest in how to take this work ‘to scale’ through policy change. In both national and international fora, the challenges of engaging men in the public policy project of gender equality are being increasingly debated” (p. 69). The key challenge lies in how authentic and meaningful networks can be built in a patriarchal society, in which men’s voices and contributions are valued more than their women counterparts. Will women feminists see their inherent right and ability to define the feminist movement chip away?

As a result of the global interest and expertise in male engagement for gender equality and masculinities work, international aid assistance and donor funding are increasingly funding this type of work, which creates tensions around the limited funding currently available to women’s rights networks. How will gender equality work with boys and men be funded? Compounding the challenge of pro-feminist men working in solidarity with women is the fact that donor funding for women’s rights organizations and gender-specific programming is on the
decline (AWID, 2006). At the same time, funding for men’s pro-feminist organizing has seemingly increased, as the field has become compelling to donors. A study by AWID (2006) found that “51 per cent of women’s organizations are now receiving less funding compared to five years ago in 2000. The status of funding requirements of Official Development Aid (ODA) in 2003, for example, found that out of USS 69 billion in aid money, only 0.6 % of ODA funding has gender equality as a principle objective and only 2.4% of this money supported the work of NGOs” (p. 134).

With this limited and declining support for gender equality and lack of political will, women’s rights organizations are operating in an increasingly hostile funding environment, within which the explicit objectives of women’s human rights and gender equality have been de-politicized and sidelined. A recent report by AWID (2006) highlights this concern:

There is a sense in the funding community that gender has been mainstreamed, and hence there is no need to support specific women’s programs anymore. Unfortunately, this has resulted in women’s organizations receiving less funding, despite the Millennium Development Goals identifying that women’s equality is a pre-requisite for development. (p. 135).

As the need to secure more long-term funding and achieve financial stability intensifies for women’s rights organizations, men’s pro-feminist organizations are increasingly prominent and accessing scarce financial resources for gender equality work. This is extremely problematic for men doing pro-feminist work as they are in a sense entering “women’s turf” for funding. Pro-feminist men are inherently tapping into their male privilege to secure funding, which can create strained and awkward relationships and collaborations with women’s rights networks
particularly if a pro-feminist men’s initiative is granted funding over a women’s rights organization.

4.6.2 “Creating a Bigger Pie”: Increasing Funding for Gender Equality Work

Not surprisingly, participants expressed confusion on how to approach the resource question with women feminists and their partners, ultimately to prevent a diversion of funds from women. Matt reflects: “who do we engage in that conversation, and how to mitigate this diversion of funds for something that’s trendy now … which is happening.” Interestingly, Matt puts the accountability on pro-feminist men, as opposed to women feminists to “deal with the issue.” While male led initiatives may be understood as part of the feminist movement, this does not prevent competition for donor funds amongst men’s pro-feminist organizing and women’s rights networks. Daniel elaborates on this competition for funds:

You have women’s groups and men’s groups and it’s like a competition for the same resources, money, and financial resources. It’s a struggle point. For men’s different groups its not easy for us to share resources with women’s groups, I would say over the last 10 years, working with men is the flavour of the month. So, every foundation were interested in this work. Of course if you have a million dollars for men’s projects, and 5 projects for women, 5 for men, it’s something complicated. Women’s groups are now getting less funding and resources than they are in the past. It was generating a sort of competition. From my perspective it’s not working with men or women, it’s working towards gender equality, and sometimes it makes sense working with just men, just women, or men and women together.

In attaining financing however, “men are able to draw on their and other men’s institutional privilege to attract levels of support and funding rarely granted to women. This can, of course, be turned to strategic advantage in pursuing an end to men’s violence” (Landsberg, 2000, p. 15). However, the patriarchal dividend can be a double-edged sword as it
inherently privileges pro-feminist men over women feminists in attaining funding, resulting in less financial security and autonomy for women rights networks. Chris elaborates on dealing with their women’s rights partners ‘financial crisis’:

We have tried to be available during financial crisis amongst our partner organizations and fundraise on their behalf. We give clear statements when we’ve been asked to, you know, we’ve spoken out against organizations that do unprincipled work with men and boys. We’re seen as being at a kind of ideological level to be reasonably credible.

It becomes clear that pro-feminist men need to be explicit in their wanting to create additional funding for gender equality work, which seeks to engage boys and men. Matt elaborates:

We enter all these relationships recognizing the resource question, and we will be advocates and allies with you [women’s rights organizations] in pushing for not cutting smaller pieces of the same pie, but making a bigger pie, that also includes masculinity work in the context of violence against women, and primary prevention work with men and boys.

Some participants spoke of the importance in identifying clear responsibilities and a unified project plan to ensure resource equity with women’s rights networks. Chris states that “we need to do advocacy and grant writing together to make sure the sector is adequately funded, rather than blaming them [women’s rights organizations] for not having their own funds.” Arasu similarly states the importance of collaboration in developing strategies alongside women’s rights organizations, he states:

I’ve done a lot of work with UN Women- we work together to define the strategy. If you have this, women’s rights organizations will know ‘these guys’ aren’t running away with our resources. It’s very much working together as true partners. The whole masculinity field, its to strengthen the feminist domain. Ultimately my mission is to promote gender equality.
While this may be the goal, the lure of securing funding may fuel what Chris would refer to as ‘unprincipled work’ with boys and men. Rahim explores the financial incentive for the rise of men’s groups:

Some of their [women feminists’] concern is so true, when you look at some of the men’s groups in the region; it’s only for money. I see that in that way. Men have to earn, it’s an opportunity. The development field is a huge job market in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Rahim points to a significant problem for experienced women’s rights networks as men who have little experience in the field of pro-feminist organizing are competing for limited funding for gender equality work. For example, according to June Zeitlin, Executive Director of Women’s Environment and Development Organization, “currently only 0.1 percent of the total official development assistance is being spent on gender equality. Look at UNIFEM…last year, its funding was only $57 million. By contrast, the U.N. Fund for Population received about $565 million” (found in Haider, 2007, p. 1). With a mere 0.1% of development assistance going towards gender equality work, male participants’ commitment to finding additional funds is increasingly vital particularly if they want to “join” the feminist struggle for liberation (and resources). Daniel mentions the issue of inconsistent and gender neutral donor requirements as being a challenge for men’s pro-feminist organizing. He states: “They’re generating their own agendas. The UN has their own agenda, private foundations have their own agendas, and it’s not necessarily including gender equality or men and women together.”

Similarly, Matt points to negative impacts that project-based donor requirements can have in alliance-building with women’s rights networks. He states: “The best partnerships are long-term and relationships that go over time, but the reality of the non-profit world now, some are just 1 off for a specific project. But the best ones are ongoing.”
Also affecting alliance-building, Chris reflects on the growth of his respective organization and having increased financial security:

> We run into some troubles as we’ve grown quite quickly and have larger budgets that many other orgs do, and I think that makes our working relationships awkward that we have resources they don’t have. And of course collectively women’s rights organizations have much much more money than we do but we are probably the 2nd largest in the gender justice sector. That can create some awkwardness.

It would be difficult not to see the trendy nature of male engagement as Chris mentions his respective organization’s burgeoning budgets. The “awkwardness” Chris speaks of will only intensify if pro-feminist men continue to be silent on the subject, particularly if only 0.1% of all global aid assistance is specifically earmarked for gender equality (AWID, 2006). Participants argue that men’s pro-feminist organizing and future work with men and boys for gender equality requires a strong connection to the feminist movement paired with a strong political commitment. To do so, dialogue is needed to ensure resources are never diverted from women’s rights organizations and that the creation of additional funds are in line with local and national priorities of women’s rights networks.

Participants generally agree that women’s rights organizations remain underfunded, which complicates men’s engagement in solidifying funding for “their” gender equality work. Matt reflects on the implications of the resource question for alliances with women’s rights networks:

> The number one challenge in partnering with women’s organizations, is dealing with the resource question. This notion and the reality that women’s rights work is not nearly funded to the place it needs to be, and they’ve been living in this reality for decades, and now all of a sudden this notion of having to work with men and boys as well, and that has to come from the same pie as the already underfunded work for women and girls is coming from, is still the number one challenge to overcome.
Similarly Daniel stresses the funding needs for diverse women’s rights organizations and priorities, problematizing men’s involvement:

I want to go back to the financial point— from my perspective— it’s one of the most critical points, in terms of explicit agenda, ideologies, challenges, but when you involve financial resources things become much more complicated. There are so many things to do related with women’s groups- to support health, employment, security from violence, and of course ‘we’ [men’s groups] recognize that. So how at the same time to work with men and not devaluate working with women?

Daniel brings up a crucial point of the women’s rights agenda being sidelined and de-politicized to focus on male engagement for gender equality, at the expense of the realities of women’s subordination. White (2000) explores this tension of men versus women and finds that “some specialists argue that “bringing men in”—given the larger context in which men still control most of the wealth and institutional authority—may undermine, not help, the drive for gender equality (as cited in Connell, 2005, p. 1807). In addition to men benefitting from the patriarchal dividend, there are “opponents of feminism who have now found issues about boys and men to be fertile ground.” Particularly in the United States, anti-feminist sentiment is fueling a backlash, with commentators and authors, such as Farrell (1993) and Sommers (2000), “purporting to speak on behalf of men and boys, [and who] bitterly accuse feminism of injustice. Men and boys, they argue, are the truly disadvantaged group and need supportive programs in education and health, in situations of family breakup...” (found in Connell, 2005, p. 1806). Clearly these anti-feminist groups do not paint men’s engagement in the most positive light, adding to suspicions of pro-feminist men who secure funding for gender equality work.

Matt explores the value of partnerships with women’s rights networks in securing funding for men’s pro-feminist organizing:

It’s a far more compelling case to funders, donors, and policy-makers when you approach them in partnerships. We need to work with women. We need to do work with men. It’s
not either or, but not one at the expense of the other, but it’s together. At the same time, women alone can’t change men, and it’s not their responsibility, we have to own that ourselves, we have to be the messengers and challengers, it’s time to raise the bar…

Matt demonstrates an understanding that pro-feminist men’s expectations of women’s rights networks must be realistic, and the importance of working with both men and women for gender justice. The work of Kahane (1998) is relevant here as he sates that “feminist men should not inappropriately define feminist goals and strategies in isolation from women, and should not expect ongoing praise, reassurance, discipline or thanks from women” (p. 230). While there seems to be agreement in raising additional funds for pro-feminist men’s organizing, there is little agreement on where this funding is going to come from.

4.7 Will The Real Pro-Feminist Man Please Stand Up?

Confronting the Backlash

Men’s pro-feminist organizing has been contextualized with the emergence and influence of anti-feminist groups who are explicit in their fight against feminism and claims that boys and men are the true victims of oppression. Messner (1997) has traced men’s organized response to feminism extensively, and is relevant here. He differentiates the ideology behind the Promise Keepers (1960s and 1970s) with Men’s Rights Advocates pointing to a more explicit anti-feminist and homophobic stance of the Promise Keepers. He states however that both groups would agree “feminists have caused many of the problems that men and contemporary (nuclear) families face” (p. 92). Unlike the Promise Keepers, Men’s Rights Advocates apply a social constructivist approach to masculinity and believe it “needs to be reconstructed in more egalitarian and peaceful directions” (p.92). Their reasoning in doing so, however, is to improve the well-being of men, and not in the interest of women’s empowerment. Daniel highlights the
existence of these groups, stating that “for the last 20 years we’ve been working with men and masculinities, most of us working on gender equality perspectives, however we know there are some groups that don’t work from that perspective.”

Similarly, Matt mentions the tensions arising from anti-feminist groups:

So that’s something in the movement, we’re a bit fearful that may take over, that it becomes about work with boys and men, rather than work with boys and men for women and girls. That’s a big issue right now, and a big challenge of not being sure how to debate. Those groups are gravitating to this movement, and their goals are clearly “men’s health, boys health”, some are very unsavory, father’s rights, custody stuff.

Chris reflects on the importance for pro-feminist men to demonstrate solidarity and their political commitment to the feminist movement, through explicit statements denouncing anti-feminist sentiments/groups:

Among those organizations who might feel comfortable talking about themselves as men’s rights organizations- there is a broad spectrum- there are some organizations in South Africa that have access to government money- that hold an annual big meeting often attended by senior politicians. And on the other hand, they say we’re against violence against women, while also defending men on discrimination. They are quite confused and quite confusing and I think they are quite defensive. And women’s rights partner organizations expect us to speak out about that and we do.

Speaking out against these anti-feminist groups for Chris is essential to maintaining positive relationships and alliances with their women’s rights partners.

All participants acknowledged the existence of anti-feminist groups, which pose very real threats to the attainment of women’s rights and are a part of a feminist backlash. Interestingly, Chris’ experience highlights an important opportunity for pro-feminist men to demonstrate solidarity and support for women’s rights networks. It becomes clear that more pro-feminist men need to join this pledge; ultimately demonstrating “which side of the struggle they’re on”
(Crowe, 2011, P.50). Matt mentions the complexity of masculinities work, whereby men are starting to rethink their gender and identity:

So we start to uncover these things when we work with men, and then we leave them there, as we’re not doing that work directly for men and boys, we’re doing it for gender justice, so then we leave this big puddle of messy masculinity crisis there…

He goes on to refer to the ‘crisis of masculinity’ detracting from the broader goals of the feminist movement:

One of the real fears is that the more trendy this becomes, the more resources, the more interesting it becomes to donors and policy makers, there’s a real chance, that some groups will co-opt it to say ‘this isn’t about violence against women or gender equality…how do we get boys through grade 6? And that’s not the original intent.

This chapter has explored male participants’ perceptions and strategies for collaboration with women’s rights networks. A deeper look into the functioning of feminist space opens up critical dialogue on how men can meaningfully engage in this space, which has been traditionally a dialogue in response to male domination. Participants spoke of the need to broaden support for women’s rights issues, and support multi-issue coalitions as strategies for social justice. In exploring the key challenges to alliance-building with women’s rights networks, the uncertainty regarding financing for male engagement work dominated the discussion, pointing to the necessity of additional funds for gender equality work. Alarmingly there is very little research on aid assistance and development funding for gender equality work. Crucially important is the awareness that men’s engagement in feminism is a political project, and pro-feminist men need to speak out against “unprincipled” work (Chris) and anti-feminist groups.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Concluding Thoughts: “Moving Forward Together”

Through exploring the personal and political experiences of five pro-feminist men, this thesis has thrown light on the challenges and possibilities of alliance-building and collaboration strategies with women’s rights networks. Pro-feminist organizing is a political project, posing unique challenges for men, as they must be reflexive (but not consumed) by their power and privilege. Critical and sociological masculinities research was utilized to explore the function of guilt and defensiveness as having detrimental effects in building authentic and egalitarian alliances with women’s rights networks, and remain key personal challenges for men active in the feminist movement. Upon contesting men’s personal challenges in being a “pro-feminist male”, the wider political and funding context provided essential context as men are able to utilize their male power and privilege to secure funding not available to women.

The lack of available statistics for pro-feminist men’s initiatives relative to women’s rights networks is problematic and stifles a constructive dialogue on resource equity. The need to create additional funds for work with boys and men emerged as a central challenge, particularly as women feminists are seeing their financial security threatened. In addition to this competition for resources, men’s rights groups continue to emerge (and while their influence may be limited) their presence intensifies a well-founded suspicion from women feminists on men’s intentions and capacity to support feminist goals and objectives. Participants were insistent that pro-feminist men need to be vocal in their opposition to anti-feminist groups, making their political commitment to gender equality as explicit as possible.
While pro-feminist organizing must have at the core a politicized and feminist approach, it can also be an exciting and affirming process for men. The experience of these men confirmed Connell’s (2005) observation that:

Gender equality is an undertaking for men that can be creative and joyful. It is a project that realizes high principles of social justice, produces better lives for the women whom men care about, and will produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run. This can and should be a project that generates energy, that finds expression in everyday life and the arts as well as in formal policies, and that can illuminate all aspects of men’s lives (p. 1819).

This illumination in men’s lives however must be considered as a secondary reason for men to join the feminist struggle and maintain core feminist principles and values which ultimately promote women’s control and power socially, economically and politically. For pro-feminist men to join as allies and participate meaningfully in shared spaces with women feminists, the men found it was necessary to engage in continuous critical self-reflection, while respecting the diversity of women’s voices and experience. For them, while alliance-building is a complex endeavor, it is a necessary and worthwhile process, which can broaden the scope, impact and vision of the feminist movement.

5.2 Research Implications

The findings from this research are significant as they build upon the limited body of knowledge regarding pro-feminist men’s experience in building alliances with women’s rights networks. Through identifying these strategies other pro-feminist men can learn from their experience and ultimately adapt or strengthen their existing alliances and build new and
innovative partnerships. The most significant (and contentious) challenge for male participants was the lack of dialogue and clarity in responding to how masculinities work will be funded. This remains a key challenge as the field of pro-feminist organizing broadens its scope and influence. Thoughtful dialogue on this issue necessarily implicates women feminists as they increasingly need to be open to engaging with pro-feminist men and encourage them to utilize their “patriarchal dividend” to push feminist goals and objectives. Most critically however, “men must be ready to listen” (Crowe, 2011, p. 52) which involves a personal interrogation and reflection of their male privilege and power “and the space we take up” (Matt).

This research has sought to contribute to men and masculinities as a political project (Cornwall et al., 2011) and opens up an ongoing debate, to which feminism are pro-feminist men accountable? For example, Flood (2001) asks, “should men’s efforts to end men’s violence be linked to wider struggles for gender equality, social justice and human rights?” (p. 45). Participants were very clear in the need to expand their support to diverse social justice movements, and “work across difference” (Daniel). It is also hoped that other pro-feminist men be inspired by the clarity and commitment participants demonstrated in speaking out against anti-feminist groups. The research findings pose more questions than clarifications, particularly around how masculinities work be funded, and whether or not truly egalitarian spaces can be fostered between men and women feminists.

5.3 Limitations of Study

Men’s experience in pro-feminist organizing, and their personal and professional challenges lie at the core of this research. I purposefully excluded women feminist as potential research participants, which could be regarded as problematic as alliance-building necessarily involves
women feminists. Women’s perspectives on the value, challenges and potential of engaging with pro-feminist men therefore were not explored. It should also be noted that I did not gather information of male participants ethnicity, class, sexuality, or age and therefore did not explore the intersectionality of men’s identities as a central part of the analysis. For Petersen (2003) this negation is problematic as:

Further research is required to elaborate on the complex linkages between the power relations of gender, sexuality, race, and various constructions of masculine identity and the male body, and show how these constructions serve to exclude and oppress (p. 64).

In terms of alliance-building, I did not ask men to specify the types of women’s rights networks for alliance-building, and instead conceptualized them very broadly. It’s important to ask “which” women’s rights organizations are engaged in alliance-building. For example, how are Indigenous and Black women feminist networks collaborating with pro-feminist men? These are critical questions, however lie outside of the scope of this research project. Through interviews with male participants it becomes clear additional research is needed in exploring; the scope and influence of masculinities work, and how challenges are being overcome, ultimately to build meaningful, authentic and egalitarian shared spaces with women’s rights networks.
References


http://www.loc.gov.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/catdir/bios/hol056/2004054404.html


Bhandari, N. (2008). Documentation of a campaign to end violence against women and girls to promote gender equality in India. Save the Children Sweden and MASVAW. Retrieved from:


*Journal of Gender Studies, 16*, 31-45.


   [http://www.loc.gov/myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/catdir/enhancements/fy0661/2006018378-d.html](http://www.loc.gov/myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/catdir/enhancements/fy0661/2006018378-d.html)


Appendix A

Research Synopsis for Participants

Principal Investigator: Kate Bojin

Academic Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto

Thesis Title: *All Our Work is Political (and Personal): Men’s Experience in Pro-Feminist Organizing*

*Research Synopsis:*

Partnerships between pro-feminist men’s groups and women’s rights organizations focused on anti-violence advocacy are being acknowledged as critical in the struggle for violence prevention and to ensure the attainment of women’s human rights (Flood, 2001). Pro-feminist men’s groups are increasing in number on a global level, challenging hegemonic masculinity and promoting non-violence. While there is recognition of the importance of this engagement, there is little research on its scope, nature, quality or implications.

My research will explore this under-studied theme—highlighting two facets to male gender activism. Firstly, on a personal level, how male gender activists conceive themselves as “feminist” or “gender activists” as well as how they view the role of the men’s movement and its potential to foster gender equality and women’s human rights. Secondly, I will highlight both formal and informal engagement with women’s rights organizations and/or networks, specifying how women have played a role in and influenced male-based organizations. Challenges to meaningful and strategic engagement will be explored, while identifying enabling factors and potential solutions in how to scale-up advocacy efforts, enhance the quality of relationships between men and women activists, and improve organizational capacity and coherence. The need to re-politicize men’s anti-violence advocacy within the “new” men’s movement will be stressed, as self-actualization and male bonding underlies much of masculinity research and focus.
Appendix B
Email Text to Research Participants

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I hope this email finds you well! My name is Kate Bojin, and am pursuing a Masters degree at the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Due to your knowledge and expertise in the field of masculinity and anti-violence, I am hoping you will consider partaking in my research. Through interviewing men active in the women’s movement and experience in gender equality work, I hope to explore alliance-building with women’s rights movements and organizations. Additionally, I hope to explore how you personally identify with feminism and the men’s movement. Please see attached a short 1 page research synopsis, to gain a better understanding of this research proposal.

Many thanks for considering my proposal, and I look forward to exploring your valuable experience, expertise and knowledge in this exciting and evolving field.

If you are interested in taking part, please email me at k.bojin@utoronto.ca, at your earliest convenience. I will send an official participant consent form specifying the timelines, expectations and your rights as a research participant.

Sincerely,

Kate Bojin

MA Candidate, University of Toronto, OISE

(416) 576-8644
Appendix C
Participant Consent Form

Dear [specify research participant here]

Thank you for considering participating in my research project. As I mentioned in earlier contact, I am a Masters student at OISE, in Adult education and Community Development Program. I am undertaking this research as part of the requirements for obtaining a Masters degree. This letter is to provide you with more detailed information on the project so you can decide whether you want to participate.

If you choose to participate please sign this consent form and return one signed copy to me and keep the other for your reference. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. The goal of the research is two-fold. Firstly, I will explore how male gender activists personally identify with feminism, and how you think the men’s movement is supporting and can best support women’s human rights. Secondly, I will explore what you consider to be the enabling factors, challenges and potentials of this support. Specifically, I will seek to highlight the contestation and opportunity in coalition and alliance building between men and women’s rights organizations.

The interviews will take place from August-October, over Skype if based internationally. You will be interviewed for approximately one hour, at a time at your convenience. In this interview you can decide to not answer questions and can end the interview at any time. With your permission I will tape record the interview so that I may listen to it after and take notes. You will be welcome to review and make changes to the interview transcript if you wish. At any time you can request the tape recorder to be turned off. Notes may also be taken during the interview with your permission. You may also withdraw from the research at anytime, in this case the tape recordings and notes of the interview will be destroyed.

The field of masculinities is a small yet growing field, and I recognize it may be difficult to protect the anonymity of participants. To mitigate this, I will only name your respective organizations with your permission, and will not require any specific names of women activists.
and/or organizations you may discuss in exploring organizational partnerships and coalition building. With the exception of my thesis supervisor Angela Miles, and my second reader the raw data will not be shared with anyone without your permission. All raw data will be kept on file for five years after the completion of the project and then will be destroyed or returned to you. Furthermore, I may publish or give talks based on the results of this study.

Participants may benefit from this research, in that they may have a deeper personal understanding of their work as male gender activists working towards women’s rights. Additionally you will have the opportunity to reflect on the past, present and future challenges and opportunities in working in solidarity with women’s rights movements. In reflecting upon organizational alliances and networks with women’s rights movements, other male pro-feminist organizations can build off the lessons learned and utilize this research as an organizational learning tool. I do not believe that there are any risks to you as a result of your participation in this study. No compensation will be given for participation. Please advise on your availability for an interview early August. Interviews will be approximately one hour in length.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time via e-mail at kbojin@utoronto.ca or call me at (416) 576-8644. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Angela Miles at: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counseling Psychology 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6, e-mail: angela.miles@utoronto.ca. Please contact the Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273), if you have questions and/or concerns about your rights as research participants.

I have read and understood the consent form and agree to participate in this research project. □

I agree to have my interview audio taped. □

I have kept a copy of the consent form. □

__________________________  __________________________  __________________________
Signature                Date                Email Address